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FAIRY GOLD

After being wounded, Dick Deverell has the apparently "cushy" wartime job of garrisoning the beautiful off-shore islands of Roon and Carrackoon. But the islands are ruled despotically by the hereditary Knight of Roon, who resents interference by the military, and the course of true love does not run smooth when his elder daughter Vivien and the young officer fall in love. Even the schemings of Vivien's impish young sister Venetia fail to resolve the lovers' difficulties. With the war over, the Knight is embittered by the loss of his only son and heir, and after vainly attempting to restore his financial fortunes by the discovery of fairy gold, he falls into the clutches of a munitions profiteer.

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THE PARSON'S PROGRESS

THE HEAVENLY LADDER

FAIRY GOLD

by
COMPTON MACKENZIE

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To

WILLIAM AND HILDA NOLAN

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I

SOUTHERLY WEATHER

On an afternoon early in October of the year 1917, an afternoon of fierce southerly weather, two young officers were sitting in the dismal cloak-room of Nantivet Road Junction, where trains from the more remote portions of the County Palatine of Lyonesse get into touch with the main line. Neither of these officers had attempted to speak to the other, although they had been waiting half an hour for their respective trains. They had sat there listening in a dull silence to the wind that was booming in the chimney of the empty fireplace and to the sudden gusts that from time to time flapped along the deserted platform, tearing as they passed a few more sodden ribbons of paper from the newspaper announcements of another twenty yards gained somewhere on the Western Front.

The older of the two was about twenty-four, and his clean-shaven face seemed to mark him down as a temporary officer, which indeed he was. Apart from that he might have been serving in the Army for years. His uniform looked as old as the withered moorland that bounded the horizon on every side of this bleak station. The ribbon of his Military Cross was already frayed and soiled, its purple a dingy mauve. His cap was evidently cherished more for the comfort of it than the smartness. Tall, slim, fresh-coloured, with dark curly hair, his features and figure would have been well suited by a light dragoon's uniform of a hundred years ago. Thirty months in the trenches had not been long enough to suppress that slightly Byronic exterior and reduce him to the perfect nonentity that khaki demanded. Not that there was even a hint of the flamboyant in his personality. It was entirely a question of profile and vivid colouring, and of glittering dark eyes that would assert the vitality behind them and half belie a bearing that was nevertheless sufficiently impeccable to keep the other officer, who was a young ensign of the Guards, from venturing to suppose that gold lace round the peak of his cap and exquisitely cut plus-fours entitled him

to forget by addressing the lieutenant first that his own shoulder strap carried but a single star.

The ensign was as tall and slim as the other; but he was dark and of a pale complexion. The few silky hairs that shaded his upper lip would not have disturbed the vanity of a Spanish beauty—indeed they would hardly have troubled an Englishwoman's. He must have been about eighteen years old, but he looked less with his small features and shy girlish eyes. Indeed, he appeared scarcely old enough to smoke a cigarette without suggesting that a sudden foot-step would make him throw it away in guilty haste.

At last the lieutenant decided to overcome his prejudice against the foppish uniform of the young guardee so far as to embark upon a conversation.

"I wonder when this comic train to Penzawn is going to get a move on," he began, and covered the natural awkwardness that every young Englishman feels in accosting a stranger by bending over as casually as possible and knocking out the ashes of his pipe against the heel of his boot.

"It's due to leave here at half-past two; but there's been some delay on the main line, and the up train is late. The Penzawn train has to wait for that."

"Well, I hope Penzawn is a better place than Nantivet Road," growled the lieutenant. "Because Nantivet Road seems to be about *the* most dreary hole I've struck yet."

He stretched himself in an expansive yawn—an indiscreet gesture apparently, for it made him wince and earned an angry glance for the arm that was responsible for the pain.

"Are you going to Penzawn?" exclaimed the young ensign eagerly. "I've just come from there. I live . . ." He broke off in sudden embarrassment, remembering that the veteran opposite was unlikely to care two pins where he originated.

"Live down there, do you?" said the veteran with an encouraging smile.

The young ensign blushed. This lieutenant whose badges were the acrobatic animals of some unfamiliar line regiment seemed rather a good fellow; and perhaps for the first time since he left Sandhurst six months ago it occurred to 2nd Lieutenant Murdoch Romare of the Fifth Grenadier Guards that there might be quite a lot of good fellows in unfamiliar line regiments. France was already beginning to seem much nearer than home. In spite of the gold lace round his cap, in spite of his exquisitely cut plus-fours, in spite

of the Brigade, the young ensign felt an absurd desire to win such another encouraging smile from one who had evidently been in France, even if he had never passed through Sandhurst on the way.

"Yes, I had a couple of days' leave before . . ." the young ensign blushed again.

The news that he was going out to the front for the first time would hardly impress his war-worn companion.

However, the modest demeanour of the guardee had evidently produced a favourable effect on the veteran, for he smiled again.

"Well, personally, I'm patting myself on the back that I'm not going out again for the present."

"Oh, you're not?" said the ensign. The assurance that his own destination was so obvious enabled him to light his next cigarette with the air of an old moustachio.

"No, I'm not considered fit for the trenches," the veteran continued, "and I've been lucky enough to get a cushy job down here."

"At Penzawn?"

"Not exactly at Penzawn. I'm going to command the garrison of an island about four miles off the coast. Roon, it's called. I suppose you know it, as you come from these parts?"

The ensign stared at his companion in amazement.

"Well, I do, as it happens. It belongs to my father. My name is Romare."

"I say, that's a deuced queer coincidence," the lieutenant exclaimed. "I'm going across there, and you're just going over to France. I say, what rotten luck!"

"Oh, but I'm no end keen to get out to the front," said Romare quickly.

The senior's short laugh was more like a sigh.

"Yes, it's exhilarating for the first hour or two," he murmured.

The boy looked at him shyly.

"I think I ought to tell you that my father is rather sick about this garrison being put on Roon. He thinks it's rather rot. As a matter of fact, he doesn't really believe that they'll do it, and I'm afraid that he may be rather rude when you first arrive. He's rather old."

"I expect he'll get used to it."

"It'll take him some time," said the son meditatively.

"Tell me a little about your island," the senior invited. "My name's Deverell, by the way. R. V. Deverell. Fourth Huntingdons."

But he had no sooner invited the young ensign's confidence than a porter shouted along the platform that the up train was coming in. It was too late for questions now.

"You might tell my father that you met me," young Romare called impulsively from the window of the compartment as the guard blew his whistle.

"I will, rather," Deverell promised. Then, himself the prey to an impulse, he added, while he kept pace with the gathering speed of the train: "I'll do all I can to make the garrison a fairly pleasant infliction. Cheerio! Awfully glad I met you. Come back safe."

The boy nodded and smiled, but his eyes looked still bewildered by his meeting with Deverell as he withdrew into the compartment and the train thundered out of Nantivet Road with the thunderous south-west wind astern.

Deverell turned to find his seat in the little local train which had been waiting for the arrival of the other to make its return journey to Penzawn.

"Bad luck on that kid to meet me like that," he thought. The picture of the slim young ensign haunted him all the way across the wild moorland country that stretched between Nantivet Road and Penzawn. He could hardly have been more than eighteen. How rotten for him to have to exchange an island off the coast of Lyonesse for That! 'That' was the western front. Deverell wondered what circle of hell the Brigade of Guards was holding at this moment. It had been a long time now since he had bothered to hope for the safety of any particular human being out there, so idle had any hope come to seem; but for the ultimate safety of that boy Deverell hoped so earnestly as to give his wish the sanctity of a prayer. "I'll never again waste another half-hour wondering whether I'll speak to anybody," he vowed. "The chief thing that seemed to worry the kid was his father's annoyance. Sounds a fierce old gentleman. Wish I knew something more about him. Perhaps this fellow at Penzawn in command of the coastal defences will be able to tell me something. They were pretty vague at the War Office."

Deverell's mind went back to his interview with the Brass Hat who had so beneficently hurled him into what suggested a temporary paradise. He had felt like one of those porters in the Arabian Nights who wake up and find themselves Grand Viziers.

"Lieutenant Deverell?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh—er—Lieutenant Deverell, you will proceed to Penzawn and report to Colonel Manton, O.C. Lyonesse Coastal Defences. An officer is required to take charge of a small garrison which it is proposed to place on the Islands of Roon and Carrackoon."

Take this flaming sword and keep Adam and Eve out of Eden!

"Very good, sir."

"Do you know that part of the world at all?"

"No, sir."

"Oh, well, Colonel Manton will no doubt give you all the necessary information. The main thing is that you shouldn't quarrel with the Navy."

"Is there any likelihood of the Germans making an attempt on these islands, sir?"

"None, I should think. I tell you, the main thing is that you shouldn't quarrel with the naval people. There has been a little friction down there between the S.N.O. Porthmear and the Coastal Defences. It was considered advisable to send an officer to Roon who would be directly under Colonel Manton's orders. But of course, as I say, you'll do your best to work in with the naval people. I'm afraid I can't tell you any more. Colonel Manton will provide you with the necessary men. Good morning."

And as Deverell had left the Brass Hat's office he had heard him call out to a subaltern:

"Andrews, I thought we sent those guns they asked for in Devon?"

"We did, sir."

"Well, they haven't arrived. Send a telegram to Ordnance, East North-Eastern Command, and ask if they received two extra guns by mistake. They were worrying us for guns the other day."

Deverell had hurried out of the War Office as fast as he could. He did not want to be overtaken by a subaltern and told that his job at Roon was all a mistake, and that his real occupation until he was sent back like a repainted target to the front would be counting odd boots at the regimental dépôt in Huntingdon.

"YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU," a tattered poster on a Whitehall hoarding had glared.

Deverell's fancy came back to the young ensign in the up train.

"I daresay that kid wouldn't really care to stay at home and command this garrison on his father's island. I daresay he's as keen

to get out as I was. Still, it does seem all wrong that I should be coming down here, and he should be going out there. I wonder if his father minds his going very much. Probably does, if he lives by himself on that island and can't brag about it. However, sons out at the front are not the novelty that they were once upon a time."

Deverell's thoughts travelled faster back to the heart of England than the up train that was carrying young Romare; and while from the carriage windows he was apparently still regarding the stunted bracken and elephantine granite of the Lyonesse moors, in spirit he was walking with his mother beside the Ouse in Huntingdonshire, pacing with her the watery green levels on that hot August Sunday three years ago. While the church bells throbbed upon the shimmering air, he was telling her that he should be over in Flanders as soon as he could manage to get there. She had merely nodded gravely at his news; but when they reached the church she had walked up the aisle on his arm, and in the *Venite* her voice had rung out with such a strength as told him how glad and proud she was. A few weeks later, when he was in uniform of a sort, they had stood together admiring her tall white phloxes, whose almond sweetness mingled with the dewy scents of the declining year, with the lazy warmth of plums and pears on the mellow walls, with the tang of wet green apples in the long orchard grass, with toadstools and fallen leaves.

"I never thought that I should have a private soldier for a son," she had exclaimed, laughing at fortune's harlequin stroke.

And last of all there was that withered morning in February when, a corporal now, he bade her good-bye before going out.

"Poor little aconites, poor little snowdrops," she had sighed, gazing ruefully at the huddled flowers she had planted with her own hands. "And poor little people," she had added in a sorrowful whisper. "God bless you, my beloved boy."

He had never seen her again.

When on his first leave, he visited her grave, the Vicar told him that she had been gardening in all weathers that spring.

"She became very fanciful toward the end," he said. "She was always insisting that she must cherish what she had planted. I think the horror of the war affected her deeply. She always insisted how glad she was that you were in the thick of things out there, but I think she pined a great deal in secret. A sad homecoming for you, my boy. We miss her greatly in the parish."

Deverell wondered if young Romare had a mother who was

fretting for him at this moment. The knowledge that he was going to be regarded as an intruder, perhaps even as a usurper, had rather spoil the pleasure and excitement with which the prospect of his new command had been filling his mind ever since that interview at the War Office. The islands had appeared to his mind's eye in a hundred different shapes during these last few days. He had fallen asleep to the sound of the breakers on their rocky shores. He had woken to the light of the sun on their green pastures. Now they had been low as a Pacific atoll, now their pinnacles had pierced the clouds. Every evening he had pored upon their outlines on the chart, and tried to extract from the few names that the chart supplied for coves and promontories a picture of his kingdom. He had read over and over again the brief and bleak description that the guidebook to Lyonesse allowed Roon, and the curt sentence in which Carrackoon was dismissed as a rabbit warren, presumably of no conceivable interest to the August tourists. But in all his prefigurations Deverell had somehow never bothered much about the inhabitants of Roon or Carrackoon. And now here he was faced not only by the prospect of being regarded as a tiresome intruder upon an immemorial privacy, but with the deeper hostility that must come from the thought of his presence there while the son of the house was fighting in France.

Deverell's forebodings were brought to an end by realizing abruptly that the rusting bracken of the moorland had given way to the grey roofs of houses tumbling in tier upon tier down a steep hillside to the sea. Then his heart began to beat absurdly. Surely those dark shapes, with contours changing rapidly in the thick southerly weather, must be the islands. He stood up to obtain a better view; but at that moment the line made a sharp curve; the sea was hidden by warehouses; and almost immediately the train came to a stop in Penzawn station, wheezing and puffing with the exhaustion of its windy journey across the high moors.

By the time that Deverell had collected his kit and was zigzagging in a decrepit fly down the steep street that led from the station into the town, the weather had thickened so fast that the shapes of Roon and Carrackoon were invisible in the driving mist seaward. He left his belongings at the Queen's Hotel—a hostelry that had come to look sadly out at elbows since the spoiling of the tourist traffic by three years of war—and walked along the Marina to discover Colonel Manton's headquarters and report his arrival. Heavy seas were breaking over the harbour-mole, and the little harbour

itself was crowded with fishing-boats from whose bare masts the gulls kept streaming in endless pennons of white wings. Deverell had paused to inquire his way of a burly old fisherman who, regardless of the wind and rain, was leaning against a bollard and smoking in an apparently profound contentment, when a twelve-year-old slip of a girl with red-brown hair, hatless and wrapped in a disreputable yellow oilskin, came running up. Haste had made her breathless, and her pale eager face was eloquent with dismay.

"I say, Hamblyn, aren't you going to start back soon? It's two hours of the ebb and we'll never save water at the pier, and there'll be a devil of a sea running at the steps."

The old boatman took his pipe out with what was evidently intended to be a deliberately irritating slowness.

"Start back?" he repeated. "You won't start back to-night, Miss Venetia." Then he looked seaward. "No, and I wouldn't say as you'd start back to-morrow neither, no, nor the next day neither. I told 'ee not to come this morning, and you wouldn't heed me. 'Tis your own fault entirely."

"Oh, I say, damn, you are a beast, Hamblyn!"

"Pretty language for a young lady to be using," he commented, wagging his head gravely.

"Well, you *are* a beast. The sea isn't so bad as all that, and father will be most frightfully ratty. Can't you understand he said I wasn't to cross this morning?"

"How did 'ee cross, then?"

"You know I wanted to wave goodbye to Murdo from the platform."

"I told 'ee 'twere blowing up proper and dirty. You ought to have bided at home and waved Master Murdo goodbye from the pier-head, instead of stowing yourself away in the *Merrymaid* like you did. I told Sir Morgan afore we left as I didn't expect we'd get back over to Roon again to-day."

"It's my opinion you're a proper funk, Hamblyn," the girl declared, with an assumption of tremendous disdain.

The old boatman grinned broadly.

"Afraid of the tiniest parcel of sea," she went on.

He chuckled outright, and pointed over his shoulder to where the spray was drenching the harbour-mole.

"You do know so well as me, Miss Venetia, that yonder's no kind of weather for the *Merrymaid* to sail back home along to Roon on a falling tide. You'd best be going round to the Queen's and

getting your bed well aired, for 'tis there you'll have to sleep this night."

"If I sleep anywhere, I'll sleep on board the *Mermaid*," the girl replied.

"No, and you won't do any such a thing. I haven't forgot the dusting Sir Morgan give me for leaving you sleep on board last time. 'Tis the Queen's Hotel for you, Miss Venetia, and you might so well argue with Romare's Seven Watchmen as wi' me."

Deverell, who had not been able to resist listening to this duologue, was on the point of stepping forward to explain who he was and offer any services that were in his power to offer, when the little red-haired girl checked his polite intentions by exclaiming angrily:

"I'll never forgive you, Hamblyn. You know Father's in one of his worst moods, what with Murdo going away and this beastly garrison that's supposed to be coming to Roon, and he'll take it all out of me. I think you're a pernickety old mule."

Hamblyn nodded agreement.

"Well, 'tis better to be a pernickety old mule sometimes than a derved Tom Fool, which is what I would be if I tried to make Roon in this weather on a falling tide."

The little red-haired girl's remarks about the garrison changed Deverell's mind. Instead of making himself known he merely inquired if he was going right for Colonel Manton's headquarters.

"Colonel Manton?" the boatman repeated. "Ess, you'll find his house if you keep straight on."

Deverell knew by the tone of his voice that the name was not a popular one.

"He's a small fat man with a face like a beetroot," the little girl added. "And you can hear him shouting a mile away."

Deverell saluted in acknowledgment of the information, and turning on his heels left her and the boatman to resume their argument about the condition of the sea between Roon and the mainland.

2

VENETIA

Deverell found Colonel Manton pondering upon the defences of Lyonesse amid the usual débris of superfluous paper. He was one of many middle-aged officers dragged from rural or suburban retirement to do his bit toward prolonging the war, and he was perhaps slightly more stupid than the majority of his kind.

"Ah, yes, Lieutenant Deverell," he said, fumbling and muttering among his papers, while in the next room a typewriter clicked defiance of Germany like the infinitely attenuated echo of a machine-gun, and the wind rattled the frames of the dingy office windows. "Look here, which way *do* you spell your name? One day I get it with two 'l's' and the next with one. We're a long way from winning the war while that sort of confounded carelessness goes on. Well, I suppose you understand your duties on these islands?"

"I was given to understand at the War Office that you would explain them to me, sir."

Colonel Manton cleared his throat, and a dim light flickered for an instant in his opaque, globular eyes.

"Quite, quite. Well, the idea is this. Should the enemy attempt a raid upon Lyonesse he will probably try to seize Roon and Carrackoon as a base for his operations. And then, of course, there's the problem of these infernal submarines. I had a report the other day from—from—from——"

The Colonel scratched away among his papers like a terrier at the entrance of a burrow.

"A report from—from——" Then, in a voice that flooded with crimson his wattled countenance, he shouted:

"Jenkins!"

The typewriter ceased, and a military clerk appeared in the doorway.

"Jenkins, what was the place where a submarine was reported as having obtained fresh eggs from the locals?"

"Tywardreath, sir."

"Quite. All right, Jenkins!"

The clerk retired.

"Well, that sort of thing can't be allowed to continue, you understand," he went on fiercely to Deverell. "I sent in a strong memorandum on the subject to the Senior Naval Officer at Porthmear. There's the correspondence on the subject," he said, pointing proudly to a large heap of paper on his desk. "Extraordinary fellows, these naval fellows! I don't like to call them casual, but I do know this—that if the Army was run in the same slapdash way as they apparently run the Navy, the war would have been lost by now. Well, to cut a long story short," he went on profoundly, "I offered to make myself responsible for seeing that sort of thing didn't occur on Roon or Carrackoon. I can spare you twelve men and a sergeant. You will make the necessary arrangements for billeting them with Sir Morgan Romare, the owner of Roon. He has been warned to expect a garrison, and very unpleasant he was about it. A fellow like that, who calls himself the Knight of Roon, and whose ancestors have been there since the time of Elizabeth, should have learned a little patriotism by now. Yes, he came into this office, and absolutely insulted me. He actually had the impudence to tell me that he could deal with submarines far more effectively than I could. However, I stood no nonsense, and I as good as warned him that if there was any obstruction he'd find himself in jail. I've always heard that he was a pro-German. By Jove, some people don't seem to realize that there's a war going on. If I've said it once, I've said it twenty times—we shan't begin to get on with the war until we have conscription for the whole of the civil population. Civilians are a nuisance in war time. They're almost as bad as the Germans themselves. But you mustn't waste my time talking, Deverell. To come back to these wretched islands. Of course, you'll have sentries posted at suitable points night and day. And, of course, if anything unusual happens you'll report at once to me for the necessary instructions."

"Shall I have a boat under my orders, sir?" Deverell asked.

"A boat?" the Colonel explained. "Ha-ha! that's good. Of course, you won't have a boat. Why, I can't get a boat out of the Naval people when I want one for myself. Only last week I had to charter a fishing-boat to visit my trenches at the head of some cove—I can't remember its name for the moment—and the S.N.O. Porthmear had the—well, he actually rang me up and said that his M.L.'s had orders to arrest any boats that visited certain areas without his permission and take them into Porthmear for

examination. Oh, I tell you, I've had something to put up with from the Senior Service."

"How shall I report to you, sir, in these circumstances?"

"Well, you'll have to commandeer one of Sir Morgan's boats, of course. I should have thought the answer to that question was fairly obvious. You've been out at the front, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Humph! A temporary officer, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

The Colonel laughed indulgently.

"Ah, well, I suppose one mustn't expect too much from fellows like you. But I hope you're not going to waste my time with unnecessary questions. Though, of course, that doesn't mean I want too much initiative shown. I distrust initiative in junior officers. And don't quarrel with the naval people. I don't want my time wasted over silly squabbles. We've got to get on with the war. Remember that, Deverell, when you're writing your reports. The S.N.O. will probably take a certain amount of pleasure in sending over an M.L. from time to time to see what you're doing. Of course, you won't prevent any authorized person from landing; but I want it clearly understood that I am responsible for the defences of Roon, and I won't stand any interference on shore from the S.N.O. We've got to keep our end up, eh?"

"And what about the other island, sir?"

"What other island?"

"Carrackoon."

"Well, naturally, you'll have to keep a couple of men there all the time. In my opinion Carrackoon is particularly suspect. It was occupied by a German fellow for two or three years before the war. Pretended to be collecting shells and rubbish like that. Ha-ha, we know the kind of shells he was probably collecting. I've had the place thoroughly searched three times, and we didn't actually find anything. But you ought to search it again, and report to me as soon as possible."

"And when am I to take over the islands, sir?"

"When? Why, at once, of course. Good heavens, we've wasted enough time in correspondence already. I'm giving you a very capable N.C.O. He's a bit inclined to drink, but on an island where he's out of temptation you'll find him a treasure. The men will be ready to-morrow morning."

"What boat, sir, shall we use?"

"By Jove, I'd forgotten about the boat. Of course, you'll want a boat, won't you? I'll ring up the S.N.O. at Porthmear and see what he can do for us."

The Colonel was presently involved in a confused battle over the telephone. "But look here, I must have a boat. . . . What? . . . What do you say? . . . I can't hear you. . . . A what? . . . If the weather improves. . . . A what? . . . But surely to goodness you naval people don't have to depend on the weather. . . . Yes, but what kind of a boat? . . . I can't hear you. . . . A what? . . . A—yes—d for damn—yes—r for rotten—yes—i for idiot—yes—f for fool—yes—t for tripe—yes. . . . Oh, a drifter. . . . I see. Thanks very much. . . . At what time? . . . Eleven o'clock. . . . Quite. . . . My men will be ready with their baggage. . . . Quite, quite. . . ."

The Colonel turned to Deverell.

"That's all right. I've arranged with the S.N.O. for a drifter to take you across to-morrow at eleven. Have you got a room for to-night? I'm sorry I can't ask you up to dinner, but we've no servants. Yes, my poor wife's beginning to learn the meaning of war. Well, I'm rather busy now, Deverell. I've a lot of reports to get off before this evening. Anything more you want to know about your duties? No? Capital! You'd better come and see me here at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

Deverell left the office of Colonel Manton, wondering why the Kaiser was not at this moment enjoying the view of the Mall from the windows of Buckingham Palace. However, on the way back to the hotel he was not troubled by many regrets for the stupidity of his commanding officer or the obstructiveness of the naval authorities. The more remote and inaccessible his islands, the better he should enjoy the job of looking after them. Sir Morgan Romare might be a trifle difficult, but if he were handled tactfully . . . And then there was that jolly little girl with red hair. She was apparently to be a fellow guest in the hotel. What fun! He must try to win her round to his side.

The hall of the Queen's Hotel was not cheerful. The walls were still plastered with the announcements of excursions to various places of interest in the neighbourhood, but wherever a date was given, it was a date in the summer of three years ago. It seemed as if on that fatal fourth of August a malicious fairy had laid the hotel under a gloomy spell of comfortless sleep. The Roon boatman had done well to advise his young mistress to see that

her bed was aired. In this moist weather the whole place reeked of damp. Deverell turned into the smoking-room, and there he found the little red-haired girl puffing at a much crumpled cigarette while she turned over the pages of a tattered magazine of the first winter of the war. She had not taken off her oilskins yet, and she looked as if she were beginning to feel the dejection of an adventure that had turned out badly. She glanced up when Deverell came in, took an extra long puff at her cigarette, and blew it out defiantly.

"I found the Colonel," he opened.

The little girl frowned. She was evidently determined to be very shy of accepting overtures from one who might be in alliance with the enemy.

Deverell wanted to tell her that he disliked the Colonel as much as she did; but he felt that it was not quite the thing to criticize his commanding officer even to this elfin child sitting here so solemnly in the dank smoking-room, so solemn and so solitary, with her tattered oilskins, in the deepening twilight. He tried another way of piercing her reserve.

"I think I must have met your brother at Nantivet Road Junction to-day," he said.

Instantly the sullen hazel eyes gleamed like the water of a burn in the rare northern sunlight.

"We had a few minutes' chat before his train came in," Deverell went on. "I wish it had been longer. You see, I represent the hated garrison that is going to occupy your island."

The child sprang up from the arm-chair and confronted him fiercely.

"Then, I'm very sorry, but I'd rather not talk to you. We've all decided to have nothing whatever to do with the garrison."

"But your brother was quite kind to me," said Deverell. He had not the least intention of seeming wistful, and yet in spite of himself his smile was wistful. "I perfectly understand your point of view," he went on. "But, after all, it's only one of the hundred rotten positions into which the war pushes people."

The little girl bit her fingers in perplexity.

"My name's Deverell," he volunteered.

She screwed up her eyes in another frown.

"My name's Venetia," she said after a long pause.

"Will you have another cigarette?" Deverell suggested. "The one you're smoking looks rather unstuffed at one end."

"Well, it got a bit sat on," Venetia admitted. "And then we took a big one over coming across this morning, and it never got properly dried. All the same, I don't think I ought to accept a favour from you."

"A cigarette is no favour from me," he assured her. "I hate cigarettes. Now if I offered you my pouch, that *would* be a favour."

"I used always to smoke a pipe," said Venetia. "I found rather a pleasing one in Greenwater Cove. It was carved like a Turk's head. But I dropped it one day when I was pulling out a conger, and so I had to take to cigarettes. It was rather bad luck."

"Very bad luck," Deverell agreed. "But look here, do have a gasper and let there be peace between us two."

Venetia accepted the cigarette with a sigh.

"I don't know what will happen, because I swore the most frightful oaths that I would never be friends with any of the garrison. I nearly swore it by moonlight on the shadows of Romare's Watchmen. It's a jolly good thing I didn't, because I couldn't possibly ever have broken *that* vow."

"Who are Romare's Watchmen?"

"What, are you going to garrison Roon and you don't know that?" she exclaimed in astonishment. "They're the seven big stones that stand at the edge of the towans, and when they fall the house of Romare will fall with them."

"You'll scoff at my ignorance," said Deverell, "but I don't even know what towans are."

"Roon towans are famous," she told him. "Beastly tourists are always coming over in the Summer to ask if they can picnic on them, and Father gets awfully angry and tells them he doesn't ask to picnic in their back-gardens when he comes to London. I suppose *you'd* call them sandhills."

"I won't now you've told me what they ought to be called," Deverell promised. "You can't imagine how I long to see your island. Why, ever since I heard of it, I've dreamed of nothing else. Truly, Venetia . . . perhaps if I take care not to call towans by their wrong name, I may call you Venetia?"

"Of course, you silly. What else could you call me?"

"Truly you can rely on me to make the garrison as little of a nuisance as possible."

"Roon is the loveliest place in all the world," she said dreamily. "Only, sometimes I think that perhaps Carrackoon is even lovelier. But that doesn't belong to us any more. It never did belong to us

absolutely, but we always rented it from the Palatinate. But when my great-grandfather used it for smuggling, a rule was made that the Knights of Roon should never again be allowed to have it. It's jolly disgraceful the way governments and things interfere with you, isn't it?"

"Horrible," Deverell agreed warmly.

"I say, you can understand what we feel, can't you?" she went on.

"Absolutely."

"Well, look here I don't mind violating my oath and being friends with you. Only, I won't have any more cigarettes just for the moment, because as a matter of fact my smoking is a bit out of practice."

"Why not pitch the rest of that one away?"

"You wouldn't be offended if I did?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, then I think I will," said Venetia, heaving a deep sigh of relief as the half-finished cigarette joined the ossuary of fag-ends in the unlighted grate.

"We might dine together to-night," Deverell suggested.

Venetia looked doubtful.

"Well, I'm rather afraid I can't. You see, I didn't exactly intend to stay in Penzawn to-night and my frock underneath is frightfully torn and I think it would look a bit strange to have dinner in my oilers."

"Not a bit," he declared. "Who's going to bother in this hotel? I believe you and I are the only guests."

So, at seven o'clock Dick Deverell and Venetia Romare faced each other across a table for two laid in the very middle of the big saloon of which they were the only occupants.

"I think the wind's dropping," he said.

"Oh, I say, damn, the sleeve of my oiler *will* get into my soup. You don't mind my saying 'damn' from time to time? It's such a soothing word."

"Say it as often as you like," Deverell begged her. "But why not take off your oilskins?"

"My frock underneath is too frightfully full of holes. More holes than frock really. However, I suppose it's a detail, so here goes."

She flung off the oilskin, and Deverell was astonished at the slimness and fragility of her in her smocked frock of torn and faded lavender.

"The wind is dropping, isn't it?" he repeated. "Hark how steadily the rain is coming down now."

She nodded.

"Too late for me though. I *shall* get into a row. Still it was worth it for the extra time I had with Murdo. He's such a blamb."

"A what?"

"A blessed lamb. Vivien invented that word. She's invented a good many words as a matter of fact."

"Who's Vivien?"

"Why, my sister of course."

"Older than you?"

"Seven years. Vivien is nineteen, but she is tall and stately. I got that out of *Maud*. Only it's seventeen really. I'm rather hot on Tennyson. I liked Longfellow best last year, but this year I like Tennyson. Still, I don't expect you care much for poetry, do you?"

"On the contrary," he protested. "I try to write it sometimes."

"Do you? I say, that's jolly difficult, isn't it?"

He agreed that it was, and brought the conversation back to the elder sister.

"Is Vivien like you?"

Venetia threw herself back in her chair and laughed loudly.

"Oh, my gosh, no! Vivien's simply beautiful. She has fuzzy golden hair like those saints you see in old pictures, and she hasn't got any freckles like me."

"And your brother's dark."

"Yes, he is like Mother. She was Italian. She died when I was born. Vivien's more like Father. And I'm like nobody. Father says I'm like a bit of withered bracken."

Deverell was just going to say the nicest thing he could think of about bracken, when the waitress came in to ask Miss Venetia to speak to Hamblyn who was waiting in the hall.

"Tell him to come in here along, Annie. And I say, Annie, bring some beer in the biggest glass you've got. I always stand Hamblyn a drink when we're in Penzawn," she explained confidentially to Deverell. "Only, I was so mad with him this afternoon for finking the weather that I just wouldn't."

The old boatman in high sea-boots waddled into the entrance of the dimly lighted saloon.

"I thought I'd just look in and see how you was, Miss Venetia. The wind's turned to a handsome drench of rain, and if you're

down to the harbour by six o'clock we'll get away on half-flood, and I'll be able to go back for the letters before Sir Morgan is about. He'll be in some frizz tomorrow. They tell me down along as them derned sojers is coming over to-morrow in a troop. Pity, I do say, as one of they clever submarines don't blow 'un up sky-high."

At this point he caught sight of Deverell and blinked in some embarrassment.

"You'd better be careful, Hamblyn. This is the commander of the garrison. Luckily for you he's a friend of mine, or you might find yourself languishing in a dungeon for those idle words. Look here, Mr. Deverell, you'll have to forgive Hamblyn, because he's a friend of mine. He's all right except for being a bit of a funk on the sea."

"Now you do know very well, Miss Venetia, 'twere no weather for going back this afternoon," said Hamblyn reproachfully.

"Are you going to be good friends with Mr. Deverell?" she demanded.

"Don't talk so light, miss. 'Tisn't for me to choose one way or t'other wi' officers and suchlike."

"Yes, but you can help him in lots of ways on Roon, and for my sake you've got to help him. He's quite different to what I thought he was going to be."

"Ah, well, I takes your word for it, Miss Venetia."

She turned triumphantly to Deverell.

"Now Hamblyn's your friend, and I promise to do my best to make everybody on Roon your friend. And here's your beer, Hamblyn, so sit down by us and don't drink it up too fast."

Deverell thoroughly enjoyed himself that evening, and from the conversation of Venetia and Hamblyn he gathered much about the island over which the fortune of war had summoned him to preside for a brief space. All that he had heard only made him wonder at the immensity of his luck. He nearly blessed aloud the wound to which he owed this refuge from the hell of war. He raised his glass three times to the fascinating child through whose good will he hoped to merge himself in this microcosm to which he had been called, that thus by becoming an essential part of that sea-bound integrity of existence he might ultimately find not merely a refuge from war, but a refuge from the hatefulness of the mad and mis-directed progress called modern life.

A couple of hours later Venetia and Deverell regarded each other at the head of the stairs, while in a corner of the lobby a sleepy maid hung yawning upon the switch that was to plunge the ground floor of the Queen's Hotel into darkness.

"You can't imagine how much I have enjoyed this evening," he told her. "You're used to fairies, you see. But I never met a fairy face to face before."

"You mustn't joke about fairies," she whispered solemnly.

"Venetia, I'm not joking," he protested in dismay. "You seem to me just like a fairy."

"Oh, but I'm not a bit really. I've seen them on Roon—often and often. So I know."

"You'll be somewhere about when the invaders land tomorrow?"

"I'll probably be sitting in the old elm tree that hangs over the road at the end of the pier. That's where I usually sit when I want to stare at strangers without being seen."

Deverell winced.

"Shall I be such a stranger?" he asked sadly.

"No, you won't. But your soldiers will be. Besides, I'll have had one row with Father, and I'm not going to let on to anybody except Vivien that I've met you. Hamblyn won't say a word."

"I do hope Vivien will be as kind to me as you have been."

Venetia shook her head a little doubtfully.

"Well, I don't expect she'll make friends quite as quickly. You see, it isn't so much your coming. It's Murdo's going she'll be thinking about."

"Good night, Venetia."

"Good night."

They shook hands with the extreme of mutual courtliness, and as they turned away to their rooms the sleepy maid plunged the ground floor into the blackness for which she had long been yearning.

All that drenching night Deverell tossed restlessly in the haunted air of Lyonesse. He woke very early in the morning and lay for a long time gazing out through the open window across a sea dove-grey and smooth and damascened like steel to where the undulating line of Roon, indigo dark in the rainless dawn, sank to the level of the water with a long beach of ivory. He lay in bed to watch the island gradually lightening, until the sun rose behind Penzawn and stained it with the auburn of Venetia's hair. Followed illusion. The island suddenly became alive, turned as it were to a mighty

nymph rocking lazily on the quiet morning sea, her head pillowed upon the high symmetrical cushion of Carrackoon. Staring harder in a trance of amazement, Deverell dismissed the comparison for spoiling with mere fancifulness the revelation he was being granted of the island's quintessential being. Why liken her to a woman, as if women were the only femininity in nature? This was perfectly an island whose contours glowed with inward life more seductively than the limbs of any woman. He began to drowse upon the beauty of her where she lay breathing gently in the lucid air of the morning. He swooned toward the loveliness of her as she swept across the now pale blue sea to enfold him. With a start the young man sprang out of bed and leant from the window to fling himself into her embrace. But the spell was broken. He stood there while the sun climbing through a fume of golden mist behind Penzawn lighted up her towers and trees and cottages, her groves and heaths and sandy dunes and russet hills. Every moment added to his material knowledge of her landscape's variety. But that entranced awareness of a sentient being was gone.

Deverell turned his eyes toward the harbour. Ah, there was Venetia at the *Mermoid's* helm! The petulant motor in the stout little five-tonner seemed to be scolding the limp brown sails for their idleness. For nearly an hour he watched the boat grow smaller and smaller on her way back to Roon; and then, straining his eyes through field-glasses, he tried to discern if the solitary figure coming along the pier to meet the returning boat had golden hair.

3

VIVIEN

About the same time as Dick Deverell in his bedroom at the Queen's Hotel was discovering a commonplace about islands, on Roon itself Vivien Romare woke up with a start at the sight of her little sister's bed. But even as her half-consciousness framed the question, "What has happened?" full-consciousness supplied the answer. An instant later she had drawn the curtains and was staring into the great bland orb of the rising sun that with no more sparkle as yet than a glass of hock was laboriously climbing up from the mist of

the Lyonnaise moors. Presently upon the sea of tarnished silver, as to her eastward gazing eye it appeared, she recognized with relief the sails of the *Mermaid*. In view of her father's depression over Murdo's departure (which of course he had irritably attempted to hide), coupled with his anger at the prospect of the garrison's invasion, Vivien had kept from him the news of Venetia's escapade, and had allowed him to think at dinner last night that she had gone to bed early with a bad headache. It had been a gamble with the weather, but the gamble had been justified. Venetia would be able to get safely back and change her damp and tattered clothes in time to present a decorous figure at the breakfast-table. A cloud shadowed Vivien's sea-blue eyes as the thought that Murdo was not here to enjoy this fair weather swept across her mind. The whole of his leave had been spent in surging wind and rain, and he would carry away over to Flanders a woeful image of each dear familiar spot on Roon to which he had said farewell.

Vivien knelt beside the bed to pray for his safe return. Just outside the window a robin in the big Monterey pine sang his solitary music in the radiant peace of the morning. While the girl prayed and the bird sang, the sun which had now eluded the misty nets of earth, began to roll his great golden eye into the room, lighting up the darkest, dustiest recesses, glinting upon her hair, and penetrating her snowy nightgown with a blaze of benignant warmth. She stood up presently, and the rosy shadow of her slim body was visible within the lawn as if one should hold a white shell against the light and watch it flush with life.

The room that Vivien and Venetia shared was situated in the oldest portion of the house—at the top of a large square watch tower which had been built sometime in the fifteenth century to give warning to the mainland of the approach of Barbary pirates. The casements looked eastward over the mossy tiles of the low rambling house to Lyonnaise, and northward across the farm-buildings to where the uplands of Roon ended in the grey-green expanse of the towans, and beyond them to where upon broad dazzling sands the dark-blue rollers broke in a roar of white foam. The walls of the bedroom were still papered with a pattern of nursery-rhyme adventures. The once gay dresses and ribbons had long been faded; the endlessly repeated landscapes of orchards and wells and red-tiled houses were scratched and fingermarked; but neither Vivien nor Venetia would have tolerated another paper, so many hours of youth had they spent wandering in this populous

maze, so many rainy days and dusks had been consoled with cosy imaginary expeditions therein.

The other half of the top of the tower was occupied by the school-room, with casements opening to the south over a thicket of camellias and rhododendrons into the high-walled garden ilex-shadowed, and westward through a belt of pines across a tumbling country of gorse and heather to where the Atlantic thundered against the sheer cliffs on that side of the island. 'Schoolroom' was a relic of the days when a governess had presided over the education of Murdo and Vivien. But soon after Murdo went to Eton five years ago, Sir Morgan decided that governesses were never meant to be managed by widowers on small islands. Vivien was turned loose in the library on her own account, and threatened with boarding-school if she did not teach Venetia to read and write properly. When Sir Morgan was at home, he gave his daughters lessons in Latin, French, Italian and German; when he was away, Tom Bell, the estate accountant, attempted to supply a little knowledge of arithmetic. The feature of the schoolroom of which the young Romares were proudest was the museum, which Murdo, in spite of having a den of his own on the floor below, had allowed to be housed in his sisters' room. The children had had some difficulty occasionally in retaining for their own museum one or two finds that Sir Morgan considered important enough to be given a place in the house museum. There was that neolithic greenstone axe which John Holt had turned up with the plough one blowy March morning in the fifteen-acre field called Great Scowen. Murdo and Vivien, who were with John Holt at the time, had been hard put to keep that axe; and they wished afterwards that they had surrendered it when that very next Summer Murdo found hidden away in a pile of rubbish at the back of one of the barns a set of chains in which the body of some nautical malefactor had swung on a gibbet by the sea's edge as a warning to others, his eyes food for ravens, his blackened head a perch for gulls. On this trophy Sir Morgan absolutely insisted for the official museum, in spite of the offers to swap anything he wanted from the schoolroom museum—even the greenstone axe, even the silver coin of James the First, yes, and even the brass buttons of a seafaring man whose bones were uncovered on the towans after the biggest north-wester in the memory of the island. But Sir Morgan would not part.

Vivien, who was dressing half in the nursery, half in the school-room, as was the use of Venetia and herself, pulled the brown

chintz curtain over the museum shelves, for the familiar treasures gave her a pang this morning. The history of each one was bound up with the history of a happy day with Murdo, who was gone away to Flanders now. The curtain should not be drawn till he was home again. This time yesterday morning she and Murdo had said good-bye to the sound of the wind drumming round the tower and the swish of the rain against the casements. She had thought with a sudden pang while she clung to his arms how faded and battered and sad the old schoolroom looked beside his new uniform. The glossy leather of his accoutrements had seemed to display a kind of savage contempt for their dingy background. She was glad for Venetia's sake that the weather had cleared, but oh, the emptiness of this morning sunlight, and oh, the uselessness of this warmth, and oh, to hold Murdo to her arms once again, not in frightening khaki, but in some tumbledown old suit stained with seaweed, and smelling faintly of tar and lobster-pots.

Vivien went back into the nursery, and saw that the *Mermaid* was already halfway across. She finished the rest of her dressing, and went down the winding stone-stairs with face averted from the open door of Murdo's room, and the breath of emptiness that blew cold upon her cheek as she passed. The basement of the tower was given over to cellars, and the door from the inhabited part opened on a stone balcony, so that Vivien was able to reach the shrubbery without going through the main portion of the house, and pass thence under a vaulted gateway into the flagged court that separated the farm buildings from the house. Here she found half a dozen dogs already hanging about in the hope of an early walk—three cocker spaniels, a couple of red Irish setters and a wire-haired terrier—all of whom were on the verge of barking joyously when she raised her hand to demand silence. She turned aside to say good morning to old John Holt, the farm-bailiff, who nearly sixty years ago had come from Wessex as stable-lad to Sir Morgan's father. He was a small man with shrivelled rosy face, bright blue eyes, and a finely-cut Roman nose, and he resembled more than anything else a wise, active, and mischievous old bird.

"Good morning, miss. Oh dear, oh dear, you can't get the young chaps nowadays to do their work proper. I gi'ed young Lanyon the job to clane up the grass between the cobbles, and I'm bothered if it don't look worse nor when he begun." He reposed for a moment on his hoe as a warrior on his spear, looked cautiously over his shoulder, and said, in a voice palpitating with an inexpressible

knowingness: "So Miss Venetia slipped over to Penzawn yesterday, and got caught by the weather?" Then with the cackling chuckle of a gull he abruptly bent over to extirpate with astonishing deftness more grass and weeds.

"Holt, you always know everything."

"Ho-ho-ho!"

The tufts of greenery flew in all directions.

"I'm just going down to the pier to meet the *Mermaid*. Father doesn't know Venetia went over."

"Ha-ha-ha!"

The grass flew as fast as before the blades of a mowing-machine.

"So, don't you go about all to-day chuckling to yourself whenever you see Father."

"Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!"

He paused once more from his task, and eyed her solemnly over his weapon.

"I'll be so solemn as a parson at a fair, and if Sir Morgan don't say to I 'darn'ee, Holt, what's wrong with 'ee, man?' I'll——"

"Yes, but you needn't overdo it."

"Bless my soul, miss, there's no plasin' 'ee. But, my heart! what a pretty morning after the rain, eh?"

"And Murdo has gone."

The old man bent lower over his weeding.

"Odds! miss, don't talk about it. These be crool times, sure enough."

Vivien passed on, and the dogs who had watched this conversation in disgusted impatience pranced ahead with radiant tails. When she turned the corner and walked along the front of the house, she paused a moment by the iron gates which, between two pillars, each surmounted by a stone merman armed with sword and buckler, gave a view of the wide lawn thronged with blackbirds and thrushes and of the great mulberry tree that still preserved all the richness of its summer greenery. The blinds of her father's windows were drawn; indeed the whole front of the house still closed its eyes to the sun. On the shining sea the *Mermaid* was visible not half a mile now from Roon. Vivien hurried on.

After flanking the granite bastions of the high garden-wall the drive turned steeply downhill in the aromatic shadow of tall pine-trees, emerging from which it wound on between a green bank scattered with the ruined rosy petals of belladonnas and a densely wooded hillside that sloped sharply away to the left. At the next

curve the green bank ended in a gravel bluff sparsely covered with gorse, beyond which a grassy valley between two slanting thickets of blackthorn climbed gradually up to the milky blue October sky. Vivien stopped for a moment to lean over the gate that gave ingress to this valley, which was called Nanjizel. Her fancy was of Murdo standing there with his gun while she and Venetia beat the thickets on either side for woodcock, not minding how many scratches they got if only Murdo did not miss the sly bird at the end of it and spend the rest of the day in a state of lamentable dejection about his future as a shot. It was not time yet for cocking; but in another week or two the rumour would go round the island that the first woodcock had been seen, and then Murdo would be in Flanders. Vivien turned miserably away from the valley, and passed out of the sunlight into a short stretch of road that was overhung by huge gnarled holm-oaks whose rusted leaves upon the ground deadened her footsteps. There through the gloom she moved silently, fragile and lissom in a frock of pearly blue, her hair primrose-pale beneath a battered straw-hat, and seeming like a wraith of Spring. The ilex avenue finished with the last bend of the drive. Ahead the sun was shining brightly on the asters in the front gardens of the whitewashed cottages on either side of the road. Through the yellowing elms that overhung the little harbour the light green water was winking. The noise of the *Mermaid's* motor sounded businesslike and cheerful. Vivien cast aside her own sorrow, and prepared to welcome Venetia on the pier with meet severity. But Venetia was apparently not in the least abashed by her naughtiness. No sooner had the boat glided alongside the granite blocks of the pier than she came up the dripping iron ladder with exultation blazing from every tress of her red-brown hair.

"Darling," she cried, "I've had the most terrific adventure! Is Father as sick as the devil about me going in with Murdo?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, he doesn't know," Vivien said reproachfully. "I let him think you'd gone to bed with a headache."

"Oh, how decent of you not to make it a tummy-ache, Vivien."

Then she turned to call down to Hamblyn:

"It's all right, Hamblyn. Father doesn't know I was out. So don't you say anything."

"Not a word, Miss Venetia."

"And if you can pay my bill at the Queen's, Hamblyn, I'll pay you back on my birthday."

The boatman touched his cap and laughed.

"Were you looking out for me?" she turned to ask her sister.

"Of course, I was. Jolly lucky for you the weather cleared."

"How sweet of you, Vivien darling!" Venetia fervidly exclaimed.

"Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable, Elaine the lily-maid of Astolat, high in her chamber toward the East! What a pity you weren't christened Elaine instead of Vivien, which would have suited me so much better. And what do you think? Lancelot's coming this morning."

"Look here, I'm not a bit in the mood for being silly," said Vivien.

"I don't know how you can make such a row when Murdo has gone away."

"Yes, but we can't go on being glumpy about it all the time. Murdo would hate that. The last thing he said to me at the station when I was weeping buckets was 'Shut up, you ass, and don't make such a beastly fuss.'"

"I don't think it was quite fair of you to say good-bye to him after me," said the elder sister a little resentfully.

"I know," Venetia agreed. "I thought that halfway across, and I've made up my mind that when he comes back I'll hide in Blood Cave for the whole of his first morning, so that you can have him all to yourself. There! Now that's a solemn oath. Oh, my gosh, which reminds me! Vivien, the invaders are coming this morning! They'll be here about twelve."

"How loathsome!"

"Well, do you know it *isn't* going to be so loathsome after all, because the young man in charge is really rather a blamb. And that's my terrific adventure. Dearest, I actually dined with him last night—*en deux*, or is it *à deux*?"

"Venetia!"

"You must blame my hair, Vivien. You can't expect anything else from Mary Queen of Scots and Lucrezia Borgia and me. I always knew I should be an adventuress and inflame the hearts of divers men. His name's Dick and . . ."

"Venetia!"

"Did I omit his surname? Sorry! His name's Deverell, demn it! And he has curly hair and laughing eyes and writes poetry, which I haven't heard yet, so I don't know if it's any good and . . ."

"I take no interest in him whatsoever," Vivien declared.

"Well, of course now I feel like a squashed slug. All the same, I bet you'll like him, if you let yourself."

"Ah, if I let myself."

"Yes, but dash it, think who we might have had in command. Well, whatever you do, I'm going to be his friend, and I've arranged with Hamblyn to be his friend, and as soon as I see Holt I shall arrange for him to be his friend."

"What about Father?"

"Oh, Father must be won over if not by prayers, well, then, by loud entreaties."

"This young man seems to have had a very exhilarating effect on you."

"He raised his foaming goblet to me three times at dinner, Vivien dear, and he wasn't a bit put off when I swept half my soup up my arm with the sleeve of my oiler."

"You're looking horribly grubby this morning."

"But that won't discourage Richard Cœur de Lion."

"Well, I suppose you'll condescend to change before breakfast, and you might try to remember you're supposed to have had a headache last night."

At this point Hamblyn shouted to Alec Harvey, his youthful mate, to get a move on with the boat-hook.

"If Sir Morgan looks out and sees me, miss," he called up to Vivien, "he'll be wanting to know how the *Merrymaid* come over wi'out waiting for the post, and there'll be enough trouble to-day when the sojers come wi'out me coping it in the bargain."

Vivien agreed with him, and a minute or two later the noise of the *Mermaid's* motor was growing fainter on the quiet morning sea, while the two sisters walked back slowly up the drive, argument at an end for a while, because Venetia had already understood that she would not be doing any service to Deverell by her enthusiasm, and Vivien was still brooding over the departure of her brother.

A couple of hours later they were waiting in the dining-room for their father to make his first appearance, both of them as mute as the portraits of their ancestors upon the walls all round the great sombre room.

4

THE KNIGHT OF ROON

Sir Morgan Romare, tenth baronet and twenty-second Knight of Roon, had entered his sixty-fifth year a couple of months before this October morning. But he looked years younger, with his Wellingtonian figure and face, and that undiminished head of hair in which obstinate streaks of flaxen still held out here and there against the white of age. At forty-four he had married Donna Margherita Della Rosa, a younger daughter of the junior branch of a distinguished Umbrian family. She had died in giving birth to his youngest daughter Venetia, whereupon Sir Morgan had resumed, with unimpaired vitality of will, the manner of life that his marriage had interrupted for just over eight years. There is no particular physiognomy which labels the gambler, but nevertheless it was always a shock to people when they discovered the extent to which that ascetic and aristocratic countenance was at the mercy of the passion for play. It had dominated Sir Morgan's whole life. Even as a small boy he had backed his own gamecocks against his father's and those of his father's friends who came over from the mainland for the fine sport that was always to be had in the Roon cockpit. Sir Morven, his father, died a month or so after he came of age, and Sir Morgan took to breeding horses which he ran not merely at West Country race-meetings, but later, to the great detriment of his estate, all over England. After a few years of reckless plunging he had to sell up his stable and economize by spending much of his time on the Continent. Actually, the reason why Sir Morgan found the Continent so economical was a run of luck at every gaming-table where he played, which lasted for three years. The memory of those invincible evenings was sufficiently vivid to make baccarat the last and the strongest passion of his life. All of what he had won and a good deal more besides had been lost when he first met Donna Margherita; and in a temporary reaction against play caused by a series of disastrous visits to the tables and a sudden panic over the extinction of his name, he married her. She must have been a woman of singular strength of mind and of enduring charm to prevent her husband's squandering the rest of his estate as soon as he began to forget that he could lose at baccarat. But for eight years

she kept him away from the cards; perhaps if on her death-bed she had exacted from him a promise to play no more, he might have kept his word. But Donna Margherita did not feel justified in doing this. Her own death struck her as a kind of desertion. She blamed herself for leaving him, and she regarded the priest's preparations for her longest journey with impatience. To her they seemed like the assurances of a courier that her tickets and passport were in order, her luggage labelled, and her wagon-lit booked, when all the time death was really a delightful holiday in which she had no right to indulge herself.

The older children had a good governess; the baby had a good nurse. Sir Morgan felt that he must go abroad for a while, and from that time onward until just after Murdo went to Eton his existence became once more a succession of continental spas, during which except in the middle of Summer he was hardly ever on the island. Then came what he called an exceptional run of bad luck, which really meant that his bank protested against any further extension of his overdraft. He came back to Roon and, finding that Vivien's governess was inclined to forget that she was not the mistress of the island, he got rid of her and assumed the responsibility of his two girls' education. This was when Vivien was about fifteen. He was so much cramped for money that he had to cut down his expenses, so that when war broke out the farm on Roon was in a worse condition than it had been in for years. But he had managed to reduce his overdraft, and he had planned to go to Marienbad that fatal August. The war by keeping him at home against his will enraged him. He had many good friends in Germany, and for the French he possessed a profound contempt. However, the harm being done, Sir Morgan tried to submerge his own feelings; and, though the idea of sending his only son and heir to Sandhurst so that he could while still in his 'teens fight for an intolerable country like France maddened him, he compelled himself to do it. And now after more than three years of what Sir Morgan considered disasters created by an unnatural alliance he was informed that his island was to be garrisoned and put under the orders of a second-rate elderly duffer like Colonel Manton, and this at the moment when his only son and heir was going to the front.

In spite of being considered by the rest of the Palatinate a reprehensibly careless parent, Sir Morgan was genuinely devoted to his attractive children, and although he had sacrificed the welfare of Roon to his mania for baccarat he dreaded to find himself in old

age without a male heir to succeed him. The dread of losing Murdo was strangely mingled with what amounted to an acute jealousy of his freedom. The desire to cross the Channel again became an obsession with Sir Morgan. He had been feeling like a prisoner on the island, and his irritability was increased by Murdo's departure. His financial condition was worse than ever, because nearly all his money was invested in foreign securities and apart from Roon he owned no land, so that with his income seriously reduced by the war he was for ever nowadays at the mercy of the feverish hope of presently making up for what, with the gambler's superstition, he considered the bad luck of his investments by the run of good luck he would surely have at cards when this accursed war came to an end and he was free to tempt fortune again.

When Venetia saw her father's angry face coming into the dining-room that morning, she squeezed Vivien's hand to express her deep appreciation of being saved from being the first victim of that turbulent mood.

"Half-past nine, and breakfast not yet on the table?" Sir Morgan exclaimed, striding across to give a furious tug at the bell-rope. Neither of his daughters ventured to remind him that it was the custom to ring his bedroom-bell five minutes before he was ready to come downstairs. For one thing it would only have made him angrier and for another Siddle, the butler, was not a favourite of theirs. They considered him slimy, and between him and them there had always been hostility.

But Siddle was too clever not to dodge his master's rage.

"The boat is just in, Sir Morgan," he murmured in that smooth voice which, as Venetia said, always sounded like the best port being decanted very carefully. "And the boy Harvey has hurried on up the hill to bring word that the garrison will be arriving about noon, Sir Morgan."

Venetia told Vivien afterwards that she was very nearly crawled under the table to avoid seeing Father have an apoplectic fit.

"I felt sure he was going to burst. Didn't you? And I couldn't make out once or twice if they were gurgles in his throat or new swear words, but I think they were only gurgles. And *did* you notice the way he cut the tops off his eggs? One hit Jemima's nose on the hearthrug, and I was so all over the moon about it that I said 'So much for Buckingham' quite loud. My gosh, won't the reaping-hook be hard at work this morning! I do hope he won't chop one of the soldiers in half."

The Knight's reaping-hook was a recognized storm signal on Roon. The ploughman driving his black horses into the west wind, their manes blown back like crested waves, a hundred gulls screaming astern, would see his tall lean form come striding along the road that spanned the top of the island and slashing to right and left at elder-bushes or gorse or greening mats of honeysuckle beside it. And he would pray that he might not have the ill-luck to break a share on some hidden lump of granite just as Sir Morgan passed. Once a ploughman had broken six shares on one furrow while Sir Morgan was standing by, reaping-hook in hand, and he told Holt afterwards that he was expecting every moment that the next thing to crack would be his own skull under the reaping-hook. Yes, it was an ominous weapon. The gardeners would dig as if for treasure when they heard the swish of it along the ilex-shadowed walks. The haymakers would toss the swaths like frenzied bulls when the kexes that grew rank in the ditch on the other side of the wall were seen to totter and above the granite boulders Sir Morgan's white hat was visible and the glint of his sickle in the June sunlight. Even old John Holt, who had known the Knight of Roon since he was seven years old, would manage somehow to hop about a little more alertly than usual and urge to greater exertion the men that were loading up the sea-weed from the long beach beside the towans.

"Odds! Pitch'un up a bit faster, boys," he would adjure them in a hoarse whisper, while he threw an anxious glance over his shoulder to that tall figure striding toward them over the glaucous drifts of sea-holly, his sickle reaping the wind.

Venetia was right. Half an hour before noon Sir Morgan was standing at the pier-head, a spy-glass in one hand, the reaping-hook in the other. For the moment his weapon was idle. Even he in his rage was not prepared to try to chop down the four stout mooring-posts along the side of the quay.

Every minute the drifter steamed rapidly nearer, looking to the inhabitants of Roon who at a safe distance from Sir Morgan were watching its approach, a dark and menacing and formidably large craft. On the top of the hill speculation about the likely turn that events would take was free. John Holt was not easily lured away from the cares of the farm, but even he was standing on one of the big stones which enabled the people of Roon to look over the wall that sheltered the farm-road from the sloping meadow below and enjoy the prospect of the mainland.

"A' look now," he cried in great excitement. "I'm danged if

'twould surprise I to see Sir Morgan take a good slash at they proctoring sojers, and 'twould surely sarve 'un right."

His wife, who without the slightest hint of possible success had spent forty years of married life in trying to quench her husband's vitality, pursed up her lips.

"I do know some folk as anyone would think ought to be old enough to knaw better talk more turble foolish sometimes than maids to a wedding. As if Sir Morgan would do any such a thing! I'm ashamed for 'ee, John."

"Ah, bah!" retorted John. "If women's tongues could be clipped the same as wool from sheep this world would be a warmer place."

Vivien, who did not like to see her father in one of his rages, had retired with the dogs to the cliffs on the western side of the island, where on a heathery slope starred with the lingering yellow flowers of tormentil she sat listening to the whoof of the Atlantic in the caves below—caves that were flooded by the long swell as her heart was flooded by sorrow.

Venetia on the other hand had taken up her position in the ancient elm-tree that overhung a triangle of rank grass outside the lower gates of the drive. The tree was not tall, but it had a wide spread of branches, and how its trunk had ever reached such a growth here almost at the water's edge was a puzzle; but trees and people have both grown less hardy with the progress of time. Other elms planted by Sir Morven Romare seventy years ago looked skinny witches beside this broad-chested old aborigine that must have stood here when the first Romare beached his lymphad on the sand and leapt ashore on Roon nearly five hundred years ago.

Venetia rather enjoyed watching the course of one of her father's tempers provided that she did not come within range of it herself. She derived from them the kind of pleasure that children in towns get from a visit to the theatre. Moreover, she was anxious to see how her new friend would comport himself when confronted by her father; and as the dark drifter with its khaki figures drew alongside the pier she cooed to herself with excitement.

Deverell had not been favourably impressed by the sergeant and twelve men that Colonel Manton had collected for the defence of Roon and Carrackoon. However important their commanding officer might consider the Lyonesse defence force, the danger of a raid by the Germans was evidently not taken very seriously by the authorities, and the employment of two battalions in the late 'teens of the Palatinate Light Infantry in digging trenches on the Lyon-

nesse moors was probably due more than anything else to the anxiety of the Home Command to preserve its apparent importance despite the prominence of the Western Front in the public's mind. From those two scratch battalions Colonel Manton had chosen twelve of the scratchiest units, and Deverell could not help wondering how it was that he had not been able to spare one of his own middle-aged subalterns. He might be under-officered, but of such officers as Deverell had seen in Penzawn one more or less would hardly be noticed. However, as he chatted with the old skipper on the little bridge, he forgot about his wretched men in the pleasure of the short voyage. The skipper had been at Gallipoli with his drifter and was contemptuous of these tranquil waters.

"Up there it was shot an' shell, shot an' shell all the blurry time, an' I kind of got used to it. But here . . ." he spat scornfully. . . . "Why, if Colonel Blurry Manton slipped on a bit of blurry orange-peel he'd want to know why the Royal Blurry Navy weren't looking after the seat of his breeches. But off Gallipoli, well, that was *all* right, that was. I remember once there was an officer standing where you might be standing now, and he was yarning about Lowestoft and which he knew well. All of a sudden there come a whine and a splash and we got one just over from a terrible Turk who was hidden in some trees between Helles and Anzac. So I put the hellum hard a-starboard, till another dropped on our port-beam. So I put the hellum hard a-port. And there was we dodging to port and starboard and the Turks a-missing us every blurry time. The officer, he didn't quite like it, and I said to him after a bit, 'It's you they're aiming at.' 'Me?' he says a bit narvous-like. 'Yes,' I says. 'They've spotted your helmet.' 'Good Hevvings, skipper,' he says, 'why hever didn't you tell me before?' and with that he pulls off his helmet and pitches of it overboard. Laugh? Cor, I pretty nigh bust myself a-laughing. *In* fact I forgot whether I'd gone hard a-starboard or hard a-port last, and the next one missed us by inches."

At this moment the skipper caught sight of one of the garrison teasing the ship's cat.

"Hi, you!" he thundered. "Leave that animile alone! Because you've got a face like a monkey with the toothache, you needn't think this ship's the blurry Zoo. Yes," he went on meditatively, turning to Deverell. "It's quiet. Very quiet it is round these waters. Too quite really. There was a bit of life Gallipoli way, though eggs was hard to come by."

"You don't think I shall be worried much on Roon?" Deverell laughed.

"Worried on Roon? The only thing as will worry you on Roon is whether it's yesterday or the day after tomorrow."

By this time the island seemed to be rushing toward them. Deverell's heart leapt in response to see how much better wooded it was than he had realized, and how every yard intensified the richness and variety of the colouring. Nobody who has not experienced the wonder of approaching a small island in a small ship can imagine the eloquence with which land speaks in such conditions, providing an indescribable sensation which it is idle to waste words in attempting to re-create.

As the skipper slowed down to half-speed he seized his megaphone and shouted to the solitary figure on the pierhead.

"Hi! Move that boat from where she is, if you don't want her stove in against the sides of the pier."

Deverell then saw that the *Mermaid* was moored in the middle of the pier, so that the drifter could not come alongside.

The solitary figure paid no attention, and the skipper, putting his engines at dead slow, swung in gradually toward the pier's head.

"Hi!" he shouted again. "Stand by and make a rope fast. I want to warp her in."

But the solitary figure remained silent and immobile, and it was borne in on Deverell that this must be Sir Morgan Romare himself. He went forward and shouted:

"I'm afraid, sir, you had no notice of the garrison's arrival this morning. I'm sorry, but it was unavoidable. Would you be kind enough to ask your boatman to catch a rope?"

But still the solitary figure stood impassive.

Hamblyn's maritime instincts, however, were stronger than his respect for his master. He surrendered to the inevitable, took the *Mermaid* farther in, and a few minutes later was ready to catch the rope flung from the drifter, which he made fast to one of the bollards.

The Knight of Roon raised his arm, and it looked for a moment as if he was going to cut through the offending rope with his reaping hook. Then he too surrendered to the inevitable and watched the garrison disembark.

5

THE PINE WOOD

The commander of the garrison was thoroughly discouraged by his first experience of Roon. Young Murdoch Romare had been only too right when he had prophesied that his father was not likely to make things easy for the intruders. Difficult was a mild epithet for the Knight of Roon's behaviour. Impossible would have been nearer the mark.

The first trouble was over the men's billets.

"Do the military authorities expect me to provide barracks for as many of the tag, rag and bobtail of the British Army as they choose to land on my island without consulting me?" Sir Morgan demanded grandly. "I assumed not unreasonably, as I think, when I first heard of this monstrous imposition that you and your men would lie under canvas."

Deverell apologized for the failure of his superior officer to notify Sir Morgan of the date of the occupation, pointed out that he had only arrived in Penzawn yesterday, and added that in the circumstances he could hardly be held responsible for the lack of courtesy and consideration.

"I am not blaming you, my good fellow," said the angry Knight. "The point I am trying to make is that there are no suitable buildings in which to house your men. You do not expect me to turn my own people out of doors? You do not expect me to empty my barns? And you surely do not expect me to invite you and your . . ." the Knight paused for a perceptible instant before he could apparently bring himself to allow the garrison a common humanity with himself . . . "your men to spend the next few months in my own house?"

"You have no buildings of any kind that are not in use?" Deverell asked, trying not to be angry himself.

Finally Sir Morgan admitted that there was a row of five vacant cottages, the red pantiles of which were visible through the yellowing elms that were already shedding their leaves in the green water of the little harbour.

"But they're not in very good repair," he added. "And I suppose I may presume that the government does not expect my

mason to put the roofs in order, or my carpenter to see that the sashes of the windows are weatherproof?"

Deverell found out afterwards that these cottages had been untenanted for several years, ever since Sir Morgan's straitened finances had led him to reduce very considerably the island staff. He was too thankful, however, to get any kind of a shelter for his men, without being laid under the unpleasant necessity of compelling Sir Morgan to find one for them, to criticize the accommodation too severely. The men themselves, of course, grumbled heartily when they saw the pools of plaster on the floors, the ferns growing in the cracks of the walls, and all the other signs of disoccupation and decay.

"Gawd," one of them muttered. "What's he think we are? Whelks? Why don't he put us in a blooming aquarium and feed us on ants' eggs while he's about it?"

"Now then stop that talking, you men," said Deverell sharply. "The chaps out in the trenches would think this billet something like paradise."

There were plenty of scowls for the young lieutenant, but the open grouching ceased, and Deverell did his best to put a stop to it for good and all by choosing the most tumbledown cottage for his own quarters. He already knew enough about the temper of his men not to put too great a strain on them, and more for the sake of Sir Morgan himself than for his own he asked his permission to borrow a few bits of furniture.

"I've learnt by now," he said in answer to the Knight's indignant refusal, "that it is always better to humour as far as possible the class of men I have under my command. If they haven't a fairly comfortable place to sit when they're off duty they will only get into mischief, and my suggestion was really made in your interest, sir."

"I've no objection to their using the Old Inn in the evenings."

"The inn?" Deverell repeated in astonishment.

"Nowadays, of course, it never actually serves as an inn," Sir Morgan explained, "but my people use it as a recreation room, and drink can be obtained there from six o'clock to ten."

Deverell looked dubious.

"If I might make the suggestion, sir, I should advise you in your own interest to close up the Inn while the garrison is here."

"Certainly not," said the old gentleman fiercely. "Do you suppose I am going to change customs on this island that have been

respected for years, merely because a self-important armadillo like Colonel Manton chooses to land a squad of shirkers upon it?"

"If I put the Inn out of bounds for my men, it will cause discontent, sir."

"Then don't put it out of bounds. I tell you I have no objection to their using the Inn."

Deverell remembered Sergeant Gusborne who was to be out of temptation on Roon, and sighed. He felt bound to press Sir Morgan about the furniture, so that at any rate the men could have an alternative place in which to spend their evenings. Finally with a bad grace the Knight gave orders for a trestle-table and some forms to be sent down to the 'barracks'.

The next trouble was over the feeding of the garrison.

"I hope you have no objection to my buying any stores that I can on the island?" Deverell asked.

"My good fellow, Roon is not Whiteley's. You don't seriously imagine that we are so over-victualled in these days as to be able to feed fourteen extra people at a moment's notice? You can buy rabbits from my farm-bailiff at the price for which we sell them in Penzawn. I will go so far as that. But your men will soon get tired of rabbits. I gave up my sheep some time ago. And we have no more milk than is required on the island."

It was now Deverell's task to notify Sir Morgan that he should require the services of his boat. When he was met by another flat refusal, he had most unwillingly to break the news that he had orders to commandeer any boats that he considered necessary. At last, after a stormy argument Sir Morgan gave way and made no further difficulties. But when the interview was over he said to Deverell coldly:

"And now, sir, having to all intents and purposes made over to you the conduct of life on this island of mine, may I express the hope that from now on I shall be spared any further demands on my time and patience? What you have exacted I have had to accord you. I trust you will not expect me to display a hospitality which I have no desire to extend, and forgive me for being unable to regard you as a guest."

Poor Deverell parted from the Knight feeling thoroughly mortified. He asked himself if he had been lacking in courtesy or tact, decided that he could not have behaved otherwise, and once more cursed the war.

"*À la guerre comme à la guerre,*" he thought bitterly. It was so

like the French to be clever enough to invent a phrase that even their British allies could worship. They did not talk about business as usual or a war to end war. Kill, maim, starve, drown the whole world! *À la guerre comme à la guerre*. Why, it made war seem as inevitable as night. It was weak to feel mortified by Sir Morgan's attitude. He should have shrugged his shoulders and complacently murmured "*C'est excessivement ennuyeux, monsieur, mais—que voulez-vous? À la guerre comme à la guerre!*" But it looked as if it was going to be perfectly damnable on Roon. And where was Venetia all this time? To be sure she like her brother had warned him that things would probably be difficult, and it was obvious that she could not run counter to her father's attitude by openly cultivating his acquaintance. Still, she might have shown herself here and there. One friendly glance would have made all the difference to these first uncomfortable days. However, no doubt she had already repented of her friendliness in Penzawn, and he might as well give up any hope of aid from her. The prospect was not cheerful. He was evidently going to spend a dismal winter, cut off entirely from any intercourse with the family and dependent for society on a drunken sergeant and twelve surly conscripts. Even the island itself was hostile, or at any rate he felt that it was when he first walked right round it in order to plan out where he should post his sentries by day and by night. It took away all the beauty from a view when it had to be considered from the standpoint of a sentry looking out for Germans.

Nor was the first experience of his men's abilities in this direction very encouraging.

After a careful examination of the natural features of Roon, in the course of which he felt that he had personally quarrelled with every bramble and briar on the island, Deverell had decided that the most practical arrangement would be to employ ten of his men in four-hour watches, securing variety of time by interposing a couple of dog-watches in nautical style. Thus four men would always be on guard day and night, with two men on fatigue duty during the day. The remaining couple must be stationed on Carrackoon. The sergeant and he would take night duty in alternate weeks. One sentry was to make himself responsible for guarding the harbour and patrolling the road that ran along the east side of the island from Rosevean steps at the south-east corner, which were used for disembarkation when the harbour was dry, as far as the beginning of the towans, where it turned round to the left uphill

and ran right along the top of the island. This man was told not to concern himself with the road after it left the coast, but to occupy himself with the shore, particularly north of the harbour where there was a long stretch of sandy beach. In this sentry's duties was included the rôle of military policeman, and he had orders to report immediately any disorder in the Old Inn, which was just along from the 'barracks' on the other side of the harbour. After a little hesitation Deverell decided that the western cliffs ought to be patrolled, futile as such a precaution seemed. A third man was stationed on the cliffs looking south with strict orders to keep a sharp look-out for any signal from Carrackoon. The fourth man was told to patrol the edge of the towans and the cliffs to the north-west as far as Greenwater Cove.

This disposition apparently worked well the first day it was tried; but about ten o'clock that same night, when Deverell had just made up his mind that he would not worry his men the first evening with a surprise visit and was playing a melancholy game of patience before he turned in, he heard along the road coming from the towans the noise of scampering feet. Almost simultaneously the harbour-sentry challenged loudly, and a rifle banged. Deverell jumped to his feet, scattering a most favourable *Miss Milligan* from the packing-case on which she was being set out; as he did so, the door of his cottage was burst open and Private Midgley, a wizened little cockney, stood panting and trembling before him, his paper-white face bleeding from scratches, obviously incapable of saluting even with the help of either a cap or a rifle, both of which adjuncts to military decorum were missing.

"What's the meaning of this?" the lieutenant demanded.

The harbour-sentry had appeared on the scene by now, and in consternation at discovering that he had nearly shot his pal called out:

"Blimy, Tom, why didn't you holler out it was on'y you?"

"Go back to your post," Deverell ordered him sternly. "I'll deal with *you* presently. Now then explain yourself," he said, turning to the sentry who was supposed at this moment to be guarding the towans of Roan against invasion by the Central Powers.

"I don't care what they do to me, sir," Midgley whined. "If they sends me out to the trenches, they can send me, sir. I'd sooner die of my heart out there than what I would here. Anybody 'ud have done what I done if he'd seen what I seen to-night."

"What did you see?"

"I dun'no, sir, and that's gawd's truth. If I knowd what I seen, sir, I never wouldn't have hooked it like I did. But I was walking along by the beach and keeping a sharp look out the same as what you give orders I was to, and all of a sudden I begun to feel all over funny like. And then I come out in a muck of sweat. I did, sir, so help me bob, I was all of a drip, and something breaved very heavy on the back of my neck, and I said 'Who goes there?' and a great shadder come up at me and I couldn't stand no more. My heart's weak, sir. That's why I ain't out in the trenches. I'm speaking gawd's truth, sir, I am reely, sir."

"Do you know you're liable to be shot for deserting your post on active service?" Deverell asked. "Where's your rifle?"

"I must have dropped it, sir. I must have dropped it when I run into a lot of brambles. Don't ask me to go back and look for it, sir. I'm trembling like an ash-bin, sir. You can feel my heart, sir, if you don't believe me."

Deverell rose to call to the sergeant and put the wretched creature under arrest, but at that moment he heard voices in the road outside and found the sergeant arguing with another of the sentries.

"It's no good, sergeant. You'd have done the same if you'd have been walking along like I was and somethink caught a-hold of your ankle and when you turned round to see what it was somethink else jumped on your shoulder. Germings? Yes! Sperrits? No! Not in these. Nobody ain't got no right to make anybody fight with blinking sperrits."

Both the men absolutely refused to go back to their posts by themselves; and Apps, the second sentry, declared that he would rather be shot twenty times over than have a spirit jump on his shoulders a second time.

"Why, it's regular turned my inside, sir. I always did suffer a lot from bile. The war's broke up my home. I had a letter on'y last week from my sister to say as how my wife hadn't been home before morning for a whole month. So have me shot, sir, as soon as you like. If I've got to fight sperrits, the sooner I'm a sperrit myself the better."

It ended in Deverell's having to give way and allow the men to patrol in couples. It was certain that the rest of them would all presently imitate the example set by Midgley and Apps, and it was

equally certain that any other dozen of the Umpteenth Palatinate Light Infantry would be no better. Moreover, Deverell himself was profoundly sceptical of the utility of his garrison. It was ridiculous to suppose that the enemy was going to attempt in the autumn of 1917 what he had not attempted any time during the three previous years. As for submarines, the last place a submarine would wish to find itself was anywhere within several miles of Roon. Between there and the mainland the Sound was strewn with rocks and reefs, most of them barely a-wash at half tide, which provided against submarines a protection much more effective than the nets of the Navy. Northward the low lying coast of Roon was guarded by an even more formidable chain of islets and rocks known as the Garms. From the west the long low swell of the Atlantic breaking perpetually on steep rocky beaches or against precipitous cliffs was equally unpropitious, while although there was a deep channel between Carrackoon and the larger island, this channel was always subject to a four-knot tide, rising at the springs to six and even seven knots, and was bounded by sandy shoals on either side.

The dejected young lieutenant had just walked completely round the island, and after two hours' stiff exercise he was sitting on the most southerly point of Roon, staring across at Carrackoon. The cliffs at this end were surmounted by a stretch of open wild country dotted with large clumps of gorse, bramble-thickets, and spinneys of blackthorn, with here and there a stunted crabtree or elder-bush. There was a certain amount of coarse pasturage, but for the most part the ground was covered with bracken and heather intersected by narrow rides of short grass, the verdure of which was very brilliant in the tempered sunlight. Outcrops of granite were frequent, whose grey bulk seemed to populate the lonely spot like browsing animals.

The hump of Carrackoon beheld thus against the sun resembled a huge cabochon emerald. The bracken was still green on those northerly slopes, above the unwarmed dews of which the rays of the sun slanted in a dusky and translucent bloom. According to Deverell's map the island of Carrackoon measured exactly fifty acres. He stared across in awe at the spectacle of this small abandoned world. The austere grey house, the keep of an ancient castle, as it were, overhanging a little sandy bay, was waiting for somebody who would come and set the smoke curling from its chimneys again like the outward breath of the life within. The steep grey beach seemed to be waiting for a boat to lie there on

her beam-ends out of the tide's reach in token of people coming in from the sea to their home and going down thence to the sea again. Even the two rocky islets of Mab and Merg, like small mounts of St. Michael guarding the southern and northern extremities of Carrackoon to which they were joined half the day and half the night, demanded something. People? Perhaps not people, but at least one human being who would not allow their slow and subtle transformation by the seasons to pass unobserved.

"And I have to repay the grave courtesy of that invitation by sending a couple of wretched conscripts torn from the cosy squalor of a town to bemoan their hard fate upon that lovely miniature of a world," Deverell apostrophized.

He rose from the stone on which he had been resting, contemplated for a moment its shagreen tegument of lichen recoloured by the heavy October rains, and set off back across the top of the island. Beyond the stretch of heath which was called Rosevean the grass ride passed through a gate and turned into a verdurous lane that ran for awhile between an avenue of distorted dwarf ash-trees bounded by great undulating fields that dipped toward the sea on either side. Beyond the avenue it continued as a metalled road between walls of huge dry boulders until presently it skirted the edge of a pine-wood, so densely planted as to offer the appearance of an impenetrable shade. When Deverell stepped aside to explore this darkling grove he found that all vegetation within had been stifled by fallen pine-needles so that the surface of the ground was of an uniform brown except where here and there the granite nosed up through the drift or a scarlet toadstool spread its parasol. Walking with muffled footsteps in the hush, he had to pause every few yards and peer up through the mist of withered branches to where the dark-green glowing roof was pricked with points of sunlight, in order to assure himself that the trees were not all dead. The warmth and silence of the place began to affect the young lieutenant's already depressed mood. The personality of these strange trees was so strong that he felt as if he were interrupting a secret colloquy of intimate friends, as if the whisper of their topmost boughs was the dying echo of a loud conversation which had stopped when he broke in upon it. An effluence of mute but none the less definite hostility enveloped him, which increased with every branch that he snapped off in his passage through this hostile crowd. It was a genuine relief when at last he saw some yards in front of him a space of bright green sunlight; and he made for it as quickly

as he might have made for the mouth of a cave into which he had penetrated too far. He emerged from the shadows of the pines on a grassy clearing surrounded by oaks, whose sheltered foliage, as yet untouched by Autumn, gave it a sweet inland magic as if a fragment of Arden had been elfin-borne to sea-girt Roon.

Deverell flung himself down on the grass beneath one of the oaks and thought of nothing but the silky black gills of some little toadstools that were huddled like a cluster of captured ebony pawns beside the chequered shade. Presently an acorn dropped upon his cheek, and, turning round, he saw Venetia's laughing face and red-brown hair peering from the leaves over his head.

"Venetia, where have you been hiding since I came to Roon?" he exclaimed, springing to his feet.

"Oh, here and there."

"I've been longing to see you."

"I've seen you often and often. Only, you always looked so haughty and cross that I didn't dare to speak."

"But where were you?"

"Oh, I've heaps of gorgeous hiding-places all over the island," she declared.

"It wasn't you that frightened my men?"

She laughed.

"Were they frightened?"

He told her about the way Midgley and Apps had deserted their posts, at which she nodded gravely.

"I'm afraid the island doesn't like them very much. We had a shepherd once whom the island didn't like, and he said the stones used to let out at him like horses when he was going by."

"I don't think the island likes me either," Deverell admitted ruefully.

"Well, of course, it mightn't," she agreed. "I told it to. But then it doesn't always pay attention even to me. Have you lost anything yet?" she continued solemnly.

He shook his head.

"Because that's one of the things it does if it doesn't like you very much. It just bags all your things. Still, it can't absolutely hate you, or it wouldn't ever have let you find this place. You won't put a sentry here, will you?"

"Venetia, I wouldn't put a sentry anywhere if I could help it," he exclaimed warmly.

"Look out," she shouted. "I'm going to jump down."

A pair of very thin black legs swung through the air, and a moment later she stood beside him. A thought occurred to Deverell.

"Venetia, it really wasn't you who jumped on Apps's back the other night?"

She crossed her forefingers.

"Honestly and truly it wasn't. When you've lived here a little longer, you'll know that *I* haven't got to play any tricks."

"I don't think I *shall* stay here much longer," he said. "The fact is, Venetia, I'm feeling rather depressed. I thought it was going to be simply wonderful on Roon, but I feel lonely. You see, I can't help knowing that my presence irritates your father. I perfectly understand why it should. Don't think I'm criticizing him. I'm sure I should feel exactly the same in his place. I realize that you aren't supposed to speak to me, and I realize that your sister doesn't want to meet me. And I can't even be friends with the island itself. To-morrow I'm going over to Carrackoon to see about quarters for a couple of men there. I was staring at it from the Rosevean cliffs just now, and I rather fancied that it wanted to be more friendly than Roon. If it isn't, I think I shall agitate to be recalled. I'd sooner be at the regimental depôt in Huntingdon than stay here being hated by everything and everybody."

"Well, there won't be any of those horrid Romares on Carrackoon," said Venetia. "You'll have that consolation."

Deverell was chilled by the mockery of her voice. He tried to give her an impression that she had wounded him, but he was afraid that he had only managed to convey the idea that it was his dignity that was suffering.

"I thought you were going to be my friend, Venetia?" he sighed.

"But I am," she averred. "And so's John Holt. He's pulling mangolds in Nanjizel Top. That's just the other side of the wood. Come on! I'll introduce you to him."

Deverell wanted to say that an introduction to John Holt was no compensation for the way her father and sister had slighted him; but he pretended to be overjoyed at the prospect and hoped that those hazel eyes would not see through his insincerity. Yes, they were true hazel eyes, he thought as he followed her swift feet through the dense pine-wood—green eyes flecked with palest fawn exactly like half-ripe hazel nuts.

Nanjizel Top was a level ten-acre field lying on a plateau at the head of the valley by which on the morning she went down to meet Venetia, Vivien Romare had paused to ponder sadly her

brother's favourite stance for woodcock. Three labourers were moving slowly along the edge of the glossy green half of the field, their backs bent over the task of pulling up the plump mangolds. In the middle of the half nearer to the wood old John Holt was poking about among the scattered roots as greedily intent upon them as might have been a ghoul searching for an unpicked skull.

Venetia pushed her companion back into the obscurity of the pines and proceeded to startle him by giving a wonderful imitation of a cock-pheasant's crow. John Holt immediately looked up and shaded his eyes against the sun to see if it really was a bird. He soon detected Venetia and at once came hurrying across the field to find out what she wanted.

"Odds, miss," he chuckled. "I'm bothered if I didn't think 'twere one of 'em come back. A pity Sir Morgan left 'un all go like that!"

Of late years the Knight had not troubled to preserve the pheasants for which Roon was once famous, and never a spruce old cock was heard nowadays crowing by the covert's edge in the misty dews of an April dawn.

"Holt, this is my friend, Mr. Deverell."

"A-look now," said the old man, twinkling as he sharply touched the peak of his cap with a crooked forefinger.

"Mangolds turned out well?" Deverell asked.

"Not too bad, sir," said the old man. "But we left 'un too late. They ought to be in the clamp by now, but in these warlike days 'tis hard to find the hands for good honest work."

"Now shut up grumbling, you old fraud," Venetia commanded. "I've told Mr. Deverell that you'll be his friend, and so you are to be, and if he asks you anything you're to tell him and never mind what Father says."

John Holt touched his cap in mock humility.

"I see you've got the proper military manner, then, since you took up wi' the sojers," he chuckled. "I'm bothered if you wouldn't fill out a pair of breeches so well as any of 'em. Well, sir, and how do 'ee like Roon?"

"I think I'm going to like it very much."

"'Tis quiet nowadays. But it weren't always so quiet. I've seen Sir Morgan's father—Sir Morven that was—come driving down from the House to the harbour in a high tandem dogcart wi' eighty dogs all barking behind."

"Eighty dogs?" Deverell exclaimed.

"Eighty dogs," the old man repeated firmly. "And if one of

'em didn't obey the moment Sir Morven called to 'un, instead of cracking him across the ribs wi' a whip the same as any of we might do, he'd out wi' a pistol and shoot 'un dead on the spot. That was Sir Morven's way wi' dogs," said the old man in a voice of mingled pride and disapproval.

"I'm glad I didn't know Grandfather," said Venetia. "I'd have shot *him* dead."

"Don't say such things, miss. 'Tis wicked!" the old man protested; though he rather spoilt his rebuke by chuckling to himself and slapping his leg. "But odds! I mustn't stay gossiping here, wi' all they roots to be gone through. Good-day, sir. Wish you well!"

On this he turned abruptly and went hurrying back across the field to his mangolds.

"And I must go too," said Venetia. "You *will* be at Carrackoon to-morrow—for certain?"

"Unless the weather changes. I ought to have gone there before. Venetia, that doesn't mean that perhaps you'll . . . ?"

"It depends."

"Depends on what?"

"On a plan I've got."

She waved a slim brown boyish hand, and vanished in the wood.

That evening after sunset Deverell passed by Nanjizel Top again. The men had long gone in to their tea, but John Holt was still poking about among his mangolds. The violet west made the roots scattered about the field glow like large gems. Garnets and amandines and amethysts they seemed, lying there.

"Good evening, Holt. Looks like being fine again to-morrow."

"My goodness, I hope 'twill, so as I can get these blessed mangels carted."

"I wonder if you could let me have an extra two quarts of milk so that my men can make themselves some cocoa?"

"A-look now, if you don't talk about it I might," the old man whispered in the tone of a conspirator. "I'll bring it down myself to the barracks after dark. Ho-ho-ho! Ha-ha-ha!" he chuckled. "Pretty times when I'm alive to see barracks on poor old Roon. All right, sir, you shall have the milk, me being under orders from Miss Venetia."

The violet light had already passed. The roots were roots again, the colour of chilblains now. But Deverell swung off down Nanjizel into the creeping dusk, light-hearted for the first time since he landed on Roon.

6

LOW WATER AT CARRACKOON

It was about an hour after dead low water of a spring tide when Deverell set out to visit Carrackoon next morning. He embarked at Rosevean steps, which were serviceable, however high or low the tide, provided the sea was not running too heavily. There was no doubt about the weather to-day. This was perhaps the ultimate extravagance of St. Luke's hoarded summer. The pale blue sea lay like a warrior's shield cast down in idleness to hold in its shimmering face the image and hue of the peaceful sky; and it was only along the deep azure channel, which at a low ebb ran like a river between the two islands, that one was aware of the Atlantic's restless hand where it gathered into folds that velvet strip of water and lazily combed the tresses of emerald weed fringing the sands of Carrackoon.

The commander of the garrison had left all his men behind him, for he was anxious to make his first acquaintance with the abandoned island in a solitude that would not be jarred upon by the comments of Private Apps or Private Midgley. Hamblyn, he had been informed, was out with the young ladies somewhere at the back of Roan; but Alec Harvey, his youthful mate, had come forward eagerly enough to propose himself as pilot and had suggested using the cockle, a diminutive craft which could easily be carried along from the harbour and launched from the steps. Deverell wished for nothing better. Boy Alec, overcome by the responsibility he had assumed, was so intent on the proper manipulation of his small oars that he did not say a word all the way across. Nor was Deverell anxious to talk as he was rowed past the castellated rocks that towered above the water at low tide. Presently they reached the channel where the contact of the sea through the slight frame of the little craft was so perceptible to the passenger sitting in the low stern that he was hardly conscious of travelling in a boat, but had the illusion of being transported magically like one of those missionary saints who trusted themselves to the sea as confidently as the nautilus herself.

It did not take long at this stage of the tide to reach the opposite shore, and, telling the boy to see that a boat was sent to fetch him

back to Roon in about a couple of hours, Deverell disembarked on the wide stretch of level sand that had to be crossed before he reached the shelving grey beach whose forsaken look had called to him when yesterday he was sitting on the tawny heights of Rosevean. A dozen oyster-catchers which had been standing hunched up over their long red beaks in contemplative digestion sprang into scintillating patterns of black and white wings, wheeling with shrill pipes round and round until far from the unexpected intruder they alighted on a safer rock. Deverell walked on across the sands which were moist enough at first to dapple round his footsteps, but after a while dried to a crinching firm expanse, smooth and creamy pale, scattered with frequent orange shells like maize, and flecked by the shadows of the unhurrying cynical gulls overhead. This in turn yielded to a stretch of gravelly shore that was latticed by countless runnels of salt water, pitted with shallow pools, and ridged with slimy swaths of wrack and fucus, out of which the shelving beach of granite pebbles ascended steeply to the low bluff that marked the real beginning of this forsaken land. The footsteps of the stranger pressing up the beach struck with the harshness of a quarryman's hammer upon the silence. At the top, a few steps along a grassy slope brought him into a narrow lane which ran parallel with the sea up a moderate incline toward the house. The brambles and gorse growing from the banks on either side had not been trimmed since the German conchologist was dragged away to internment in the first autumn of the war, so that by now they nearly met at one or two points, and made the newcomer dream that he was drawing near to the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. One sprig of gorse was in full bloom, and as he stooped to taste its warm nutty fragrance, a robin swaying on the stem of a withered kex began to sing, and listening to this song Deverell had a sudden fancy that the island was greeting him, and in offering him the freedom of this small world was promising him here a long felicity. The robin flew before him up the lane, round the next bend of which the house came abruptly into full view. Half a dozen rabbits startled by the stranger's quiet approach scampered off, their presence in the weedy precincts of what was once a dwelling-place adding the last touch to the atmosphere of abandonment.

Deverell found to his surprise that in addition to the house there was a small cottage, the existence of which was hidden from Roon by the contour of the land and the trees on the steep wooded slope behind. A high wall in which was a narrow wooden door ran from

the house as far as the cottage, and completely shut off the view on that side. He took out the bunch of rusty keys with which Colonel Manton had entrusted him, and after a struggle managed to get into the house. From a dark lobby he turned into a gloomy little room lined with varnished pitch-pine, a quarter of which was occupied by a boxed-in staircase of the same depressing wood. Beyond this room and leading out of it was another considerably larger, but like the ante-room lined with pitchpine. A fireplace of carved oak was flanked by French windows which opened on a tumbledown wooden balcony overhanging a rapidly sloping tongue of land that terminated in high-water rocks. Opposite across a stretch of muddy pools uncovered by the tide rose the perfect cone of Merg, the northerly of the two islets guarding Carrackoon, the slopes of which were covered with drifts of sea-campion that caught the sunlight and showed through the sparse brown fern like a web of apple-green silk.

Deverell turned back into the room and looked at the portrait of a stout gentleman with bushy whiskers which was still hanging over the mantelpiece. The mouth had been slit with a penknife and a porcelain pipe inserted, while across the face what was evidently a humorist belonging to one of Colonel Manton's search-parties had scribbled in white chalk *What O, Kaiser Bill*. In a corner was heaped a small pile of books relating to natural history; otherwise the room was empty except for a quantity of spiders of every colour and size. Deverell supposed that the rest of the late occupant's furniture had been removed for more careful examination. They might as well have taken away that picture, he thought. But war like everything else could not escape the vulgarity which clung to this age. He took the pipe out of the picture's mouth and wiped off the chalk with his handkerchief. No doubt, the German had loved this island. Why should this mutilated portrait of what may have been his father be left here in mockery of that affection?

The house with its dust and spiders depressed him. It was haunted by the feeling of someone who had loved it, and who by the spite of war had been wrenched away in swift and overwhelming misery. The poor German was probably moping in some internment-camp, wondering what shells the equinoctial seas had cast up on Carrackoon. Had they left him here, he would hardly have done as much damage to the country as people like Colonel Manton were doing now. Deverell closed up the house and searched for a key to unlock the narrow wooden door that presumably led into the

garden. It was a hard struggle; and when the door gave way at last, it swung open so abruptly that he was almost precipitated down a couple of steps into what seemed a cloud of blackbirds, thrushes, blue-tits, robins, wrens, chaffinches, and redstarts which rose in a flutter of alarm at his irruption. He stood gasping at the scene revealed. It was as if all that in childhood he had ever imagined might lie on the other side of a high wall had come true.

This little garden on which no windows looked lay at the foot of the wooded hanger, which beheld from this small enclosure dreamed like an enchanted forest, to such fantastic shapes had the trees been wrought by the sea-wind. The beds were a tangle of fumitory whose feathery leaves and rosy bugles had not yet stifled all the other plants, so that here beetroots, parsley, onions and potatoes tried to pretend it was a vegetable garden, and there red-hot pokers, fuchsias and crimson lilies vowed that it was always meant for flowers. An immense mulberry-tree of early Georgian stateliness and solidity shut out the East. A high wall behind a decrepit vinery shut out the North. Another high wall defied the West; and the South glowed above the treetops whose twisted sea-green trunks crowded the steep hillside.

And there was better to come. Behind the mulberry tree what Deverell had at first supposed to be another wall proved on closer inspection to be the side of a roofless house, to which he presently found an entrance round the corner. Inside he discovered that he was on the second story, and perceived that the roof must have collapsed quite recently, because, in the walls all round, the old hob-grates were still in their places and even the windows were most of them glazed. The collapse of the heavy red pantiles had seriously damaged the staircase, but he managed somehow to scramble down to the floor below where he found another door opening into a green close, the romantic beauty of which left him breathless for the second time.

On the right the wooded hillside rose abruptly above a massive wall twenty-foot high which had been built into the earth to prevent the soil slipping down into the enclosure. Between the buttress at the hither end of this wall and the prolongation of the ivy-hung façade of the house a long flight of steps overshadowed by a slanting ilex ran directly up the steep slope to a ferny glade in the wood. On the farther side another buttress ran down at right angles to continue as a low wall scarcely a yard high, beyond which was a short stretch of heathery land, and beyond that the glittering sea and the dark

cliffs of Lyonesse. On the left this same low wall curving round was flanked by a grove of elms and pear-trees growing up the sides of the low cliff, through the foliage of which one saw the yellow sands of a small cove below and the jade-green tide creeping in between Carrackoon and Merg. Except for a clump of blue African lilies in one corner there was not a flower left in the narrow beds under the lee of the walls, and the whole enclosure would not have held a full-sized croquet court. Yet when Deverell walked slowly about the neglected lawn he kept telling himself that all the beauty of the world was gathered within this little space. Presently, seated on the low wall with his back to the sea, he tried to read in the windows of the ruined house who were the people that once cut this green close out of the hillside. Some woman must have stood at the elbow of the man that planned it. Had she asked for that balcony, up to which the ivy was now greedily clambering with intent to uproot its fast rusting ironwork? But he soon realized that the balcony belonged to a much later date than the house. No Georgian wife or mistress was ever called upon to stand on such a tawdry pedestal. And surely no woman ever counselled the addition of that absurd embattled parapet of stucco? That must have been the work of some recent tenant who desired to match himself with an appearance of medievalism against the Romares of Roon. Perhaps the poor German conchologist had perpetrated the gothicism to remind him of his own Rhenish castles. Why had the house been allowed to fall into what was now an irreparable ruin? Perhaps Colonel Manton in his search for concrete gun platforms and hidden wireless installations was responsible for the collapse of the roof; but the house must have been abandoned before that. Was it merely damp and decay that drove some rheumatic occupant to convert what was apparently once a barn or stable into that other house, lining it with pitchpine to keep out the exhalations from the fierce winter rains? There must be some story attached to the change. Already the thistles were growing along the architraves; rank nettles and burdocks were shooting from the rotted floors; and bittersweet hung in festoons from the skeletons of ceilings where once hung chandeliers. A few more winters, a few more wild Atlantic gales, and what in dead years must have been a seemingly dwelling-place would have become a mouldering heap of rubbish too dismal a haunt even for ghosts. Ghosts? What were Apps or Midgley or any of their companions going to make of the ghosts here?

"Yes, I can see them patrolling this island by night," Deverell

laughed to himself. "And if the Germans did turn up, they'd be so glad to find they were flesh and blood that they'd surrender with alacrity."

Where was he going to put the garrison of Carrackoon? He must explore that cottage, and he would take care that Flanark who owned that accursed gramophone was one of the two. Yes, Flanark should certainly be one, and Mackilligin who was so fond of its caterwauling should keep him company. They would be able to huddle in the cottage at night and interpose between them and the unseen a few of those vile records which had hissed and howled defiance at the quiet of Roon.

It was hard to tear oneself away from this spot and bother about the lodging of Flanarks and Mackilligins. The October sun felt like June, and like summer waters was the idle lapping of the tide just audible. A Red Admiral butterfly came winking his slow fans upon the warm stone beside him, and Deverell wished that he could express his own delight in the weather with such voluptuous twitches. High over the wood a dozen gulls were floating upon the radiant air, floating and falling in an ecstasy, rising on snow-bright wings to unattempted azure heights, floating and falling and calling in the windless sky.

What was that? Surely, yes, surely, that was the click of a latch up there behind the house, somewhere up there behind that ivy-clad façade which loomed along the steps leading to the wood. Deverell strained his ears for the sound of a footfall on the drifted leaves that lay thick on the terrace under the wood up there behind that forsaken house, behind that gaunt façade.

"There was a small gate beyond the wall leading up to that terrace," he reminded himself. And again he listened, wondering if he should break the silence by calling out "Is anybody there?" His heart was drumming, but it would not drum less loudly if he should violate this charmed air with a shout. And then coming slowly down the steps he saw the slim figure of a girl, a girl whose face was hidden by the big bunch of crimson lilies that she was carrying with both hands. He jumped up from the wall and moved across the grass to meet her, whereat she in alarm let the lilies fall and stood staring at him, her sea-blue eyes wide open in amazement, her pale hair glinting like sea-foam in the sun.

"I'm awfully sorry I made you jump," Deverell exclaimed. "Do let me pick up your flowers. You must be Miss Romare, and of course I'm . . ." he hesitated. . . . "I'm the garrison."

"Oh, no, please don't bother," she said as he stooped to rescue the lilies. And looking up at the coldness of her voice Deverell saw that her cheeks were very white.

"I met your sister, you know," he said, ignoring the rebuff in case she was not really meaning to be rude, but was only shy and startled.

"Yes, I know. You dined together in Penzawn. She told me about it. She's a little impetuous."

Deverell could no longer pretend to himself that she was not trying to be rude; but though in any other circumstances he would have turned his back on her the charmed air of this place forbade him, and to avoid her frown he bent over and slowly gathered up the scattered flowers.

"My mother used to grow a lily like this called Melpomene," he said. "It was a darker crimson than any of these. Melpomene! The Muse of Tragedy. I suppose she must always be dark, but you know, *you* are looking rather like Melpomene at this moment."

He was astonished at his own audacity in venturing to tease this proud young woman, and he expected her to respond by retreating up the steps away from his odious presence.

"I'm not feeling in the least tragic," she assured him.

"No?" he retorted lightly. "Then what are you feeling?"

"Only rather bored, if you insist on the truth," she said, her sea-blue eyes glowing.

"Well, of course I gave you that trick, didn't I?" Deverell laughed. "I knew you'd trump my heart with a club. But why because it's war time must clubs be trumps everywhere?"

"Are they?"

"They are on Roon. And apparently they're going to be on Carrackoon. I didn't know you were over here to-day. I hope you don't think I tried to effect this meeting?"

"I really hadn't thought anything about it—one way or the other," said Miss Romare frigidly.

"I *am* giving you a lot of tricks, aren't I?" he exclaimed.

"I don't play cards."

"Look here, Miss Romare, please forgive my silly metaphors and let's be friends!"

He marvelled at himself; but the spell of the sea and the sunlight and the island was on him, and whatever she might say he had to voice the desire that burned in his heart. "I was dreaming in here of ghosts when I heard the sound of a latch, and I was really

frightened for a moment. You see, I thought you were a ghost. You're not, are you?"

Miss Romare frowned. It was such a silly question to be expected to answer without losing one's dignity. Then she had an inspiration.

"I wish I *were* a ghost," she declared. "Because if I were I should instantly vanish."

"You won't be friends, then?" he said dejectedly.

"Two people can't meet on a flight of steps and become friends over picking up a bunch of lilies," she argued.

"They can on this island," he insisted. "If I'd met you on your own island I wouldn't have dared to speak to you until we were properly introduced. And then I should have said 'What wonderful weather we're having for October, Miss Romare,' and you'd have asked me if I liked Roon, and I should have told you that I was thoroughly enjoying the change from France. But here I can forget that I'm not welcome on Roon. This island belongs as much to me as to you. It whispered to me when I landed 'Be happy here,' and with that to encourage me I'm perfectly convinced that *this* island expects us to be friends, because I wouldn't be happy here if we weren't."

As he spoke he offered her the lilies. She took them with a laugh as distant as the laughter of the sea heard far below from the top of a high headland.

"Very well, on Carrackoon we'll be polite to one another," she promised. "But I'm afraid I shall never be coming here, and politeness here doesn't mean politeness on Roon—and certainly not friendship."

Deverell was stung by the injustice of her mockery. Had he conjured the island to incarnate the being of the place, this was the human shape his imagination might have found credible. Why could she not, why would she not see that he was not merely one of the minor horrors of war, but that he was aching to be in perfect sympathy with her and her little sister, that he longed to worship with them their isolated life and to be admitted with them to the eternal youth that is conferred on those who are worthy of the gift by islands . . . by islands . . . small green islands in blue seas . . . misted blue islands in grey seas . . . tawny islands in green seas . . . towering grey islands in foaming white seas . . . pearly islands in dove-grey seas . . . black islands in seas of tarnished silver . . . purple islands in seas of crimson. . . .

Deverell wrenched his mind away from the shifting kaleidoscope with which it was involved, and stood regarding her in a confusion of silence.

"Hark!" she said abruptly, in a tone of alarm that thrilled him with the strange richness of its urgency. "Didn't you hear something?"

"The gulls crying very high up. That's all."

"Listen again. Please listen! I thought I could hear my sister's voice."

And then floating through the trees from what appeared to be some remote corner of the island sounded a dog's muffled bark, and the echo of Venetia's voice calling:

"Vivien! Vivien!"

"It seems to come from the rocks on the east shore," said Vivien. "Please excuse me. I must go and see what she wants."

In spite of the anxiety that caught at his heart Deverell noticed with admiration that this island creature knew well the points of the compass. That was enough to raise her above most women.

"Do let me come with you," he begged. "She may have hurt herself."

Vivien turned white.

"Pah! how strong those lilies smell," she murmured, flinging the bunch over the parapet of the steps. "Oh, but she never hurts herself. Besides, if she were badly hurt, she wouldn't be able to call out like that."

She hurried up toward the glade, from which a path between high bracken led round the corner into another path cut out of the dry easterly slopes where nothing but a few dwarf elders, and they blown inside out like umbrellas, managed to survive the wind.

7

HALF FLOOD AT CARRACKOON

Dick Deverell had not waited for Venetia's sister to give him leave to follow her, and since the path was nowhere wide enough for two people, it was easy enough to do so without appearing too officious. A couple of hundred yards ahead the wind-shorn sweep of the hill-

side down to low rugged cliffs some thirty or forty feet above the sea was broken, where the path began to follow the westward curve of the island, by a titanic cascade of granite boulders in whose various outlines one could fancy any kind of beast, mythical or extinct or actual.

"Her voice could surely never have carried from the other side of those rocks," Deverell exclaimed.

The elder sister stopped to listen again; and he, captivated by the poise of her on that steep brae and by her slimness that even the ill-cut skirt of faded light blue tweed could not mar, was telling himself that she was a wave of the sea in human shape, when somewhere just close, but coming up out of the earth, they heard Venetia's voice calling "Vivien! Vivien!" and again the muffled barking of a dog.

"Why, she must be in the Tol, and the tide coming in fast," Vivien cried, running down the slope in a diagonal toward the edge of the cliff. Deverell, following close upon her heels, was horrified to see the solid earth gape before them in a circular chasm, the bottom of which was not visible from where they were running.

"I say, be careful," he shouted.

But she had already checked her speed and was scrambling down by the nearer edge of the chasm over which presently she leaned, peering.

The Tol would only have added one more to the numerous little coves that indented the coastline of Carrackoon, had not the lower half of the cliff on the side facing the sea been so strongly reinforced by a great buttress of brown hornblende rock rising out of the beach as to be able to remain and bar the entrance with a saddle-backed wall some thirty feet high and about a yard in width. In spite of this opposition the sea had found a weak spot and succeeded in piercing it with a low archway, through which at half flood it began to swirl until at high tide the granite pebbles on the floor of the Tol were boiling in six feet of water. If the swell was at all heavy the waves, as they burst through the narrow aperture, exploded with a roar of cannon that could be heard over on Rosevean. At a dead spring ebb it was possible to circumvent the slippery sheer buttresses of rock and crawl through from the beach into the Tol, which was presumably what Venetia had done to-day.

Vivien and Deverell crawled down along the edge until they reached the saddle padded with sea-pinks and could talk at their ease to the little girl down below.

"Venetia, you are an idiot!" her sister exclaimed, who now that fear had given way to relief could afford to be angry.

"Hullo, Mr. Deverell," said Venetia cheerfully. "I see you've met Vivien. Oh, shut up, Vivien, and don't rage so furiously against me. It wasn't my fault I've got stuck. You see, Carrots was chasing a rabbit, and she chased it so hard that she overstepped the mark and slipped right down into the Tol. She didn't hurt herself, but she became hysterical and simply wouldn't even try to come out through the arch. So I had to climb down and fetch her, but the last bit of rock broke off or something. Anyway I've walked all round, and I can't get out again. I'd have had a shot at swimming, but the tide's making so fast that I was afraid I'd be swept round the corner, and then I could never have got that lunatic Carrots to follow me."

Carrots, who was an Irish setter, wagged her tail and barked in gratitude for the kind mention of her name.

"It was marvellous how we ever heard you," said Deverell.

"It would have been much more marvellous if you hadn't," Venetia retorted. "I screamed like a house on fire, which is what I feel like."

"And look like," her sister interposed.

"My gosh! And so would you, my dear, if you were me with my red hair and all. Well, come on somebody, be a sport and climb down and give me a bung up."

"But if you can't get up, how am I to get down?" her sister asked.

Deverell had to grin ruefully for the way she ignored his presence.

"I'll come down, Venetia," he offered quickly.

"Oh, really, there's no reason why you should bother about my sister's foolishness," the other protested coldly.

"On the contrary," he replied, "she deserves any poor courtesy I can pay her." And without waiting to argue with this implacable Miss Romare he launched himself over the ridge.

"It's quite easy," he heard Venetia call behind him. "It's only that I'm too short to reach up to the next knob."

A minute or two later Deverell was standing beside Venetia and her dog. He was angry with Vivien, but looking up from the shadow of the Tol to where she stood in sunlight against the sky he thought her lovelier than ever.

"I say, come here a moment," Venetia whispered. "I want to show you the archway."

This was much wider than the narrowness of the saddle-backed top of the ridge would have led an observer above to suppose, and when one emerged from it there was still a narrow ravine along the beach between the projecting point of the cliff and the buttress of rocks, round the corner of which the sea was already beginning to flow, every now and then darting a tongue of water toward the entrance of the Tol.

"I say, I suppose you've grasped that this is a Plot?" Venetia asked.

"A plot?"

"Rather! You don't suppose I'm such a boiled owl as to get stuck in here except on purpose," she told him. "Only the Plot hasn't gone quite as I meant it. You see, my idea was to get Vivien into the Tol as well as me, and then shout for help so that you could rescue all three of us—Vivien and Carrots and me. But now you've met her all on your own, which rather scat up my plot. But plots always do go wrong. I always feel awfully sorry poor old Guy Fawkes didn't blow up the Houses of Parliament."

"I very much regret that this plot wasn't successful," he said. "Because our meeting was a terrible failure."

"I know. All strawberry ice and sour lemonade. And she's such a darling really, but a mass of prejudishes. I say, was that last word right? It wasn't, was it?"

"Prejudices."

"It's an awful beast, isn't it? But come, noble stranger, do not tarry in this gloomy forest, lest haply we are overtaken by bandits. Yes, I must think out another plot. They are rather fun, aren't they? Even if one's mack—or is it matchinations?—are frustrated. We had an ancestor once who plotted, and he had his head cut off. It must be rather beastly to be told to put your head on the block and know it won't be there in half a jiffy."

She shuddered and took Deverell's arm.

"Come on, perhaps Vivien will be nicer to you when you restore her fugitive sister to her arms."

Back in the Tol Deverell bent over for Venetia to stand on his shoulders and reach the projections that her littleness had denied her.

"You weigh nothing," he murmured.

"Don't I?"

"Nothing at all. If you stood on my head, you'd only be a feather in my cap."

She was indeed so light that he was hardly aware of it when her thin black legs no longer rested on him and she was scrambling up the face of the ridge.

"Vivien, *don't* look so hellishly damnable!" he heard her ejaculate at the top.

Then he prepared to follow in her track. But it was not so easy. The ledge of rock that Venetia had reached with the help of his shoulders was just beyond his own grasp. He managed by jumping to grip it, but tried he never so hard he could not manage to pull himself up far enough to get a grip of the ledge above, and after trying again and again, till his wounded arm began to ache, he gave it up and looked round for another way of escape from the Tol.

"Come on," Venetia urged. And then he heard her say to her sister: "Shut up, Vivien. Of course we must wait. Well, next time you blaze at me about my French I shall blaze at you about your manners."

"I'm afraid I can't manage it here," he called up.

"I say, can't you? Look here, Vivien, you hang on to my legs and perhaps—oh don't be so silly, Vivien, who cares if they do?"

"No, it wouldn't be any good," said Deverell. "And it's not the top half that's bothering me. It's the bottom half I can't manage."

He walked round the Tol to see if there was another way up. The easiest place appeared to be at the back, for although this would involve the longest climb, on account of the Tol's having been as it were dug out with a huge heart-shaped spade from the steep slope above the cliffs, the face was not quite so sheer as the sides, and the vegetation was more convenient. The floor of the Tol was composed of small flat slabs of granite, and its circumference rested on a stratum of naked hornblende about six feet high, the surface of which resembled a damp brown mackintosh. Above this at the point selected by Deverell for his ascent the python trunk of an immense ivy offered a good support for the climber until the inclination became more practicable. He had swung himself up and nearly reached the easier upper half when he heard Venetia cry out that Carrots had been forgotten. He heard the elder sister protest against his going down again, but that only made him more determined to rescue the dog who was now yapping nervously below him. Back on the floor of the Tol Deverell saw the water was already beginning to swirl through the arch, so rapid and so capricious was the flow of the tide round this point of Carrackoon. He held on with one arm to the trunk of the ivy, and called to the dog to jump up

the rocky base. After several efforts he managed to seize her by the scruff of the neck and drag her up with him. But it was a severe strain. There are few dogs that can match the nervous excitability of an Irish setter and there is nothing that makes any dog so hysterical as trying to help it up a steep cliff. Added to this was the weakness of one of his own arms, so that from time to time he had to press Carrots into the ivy with his body while he held with both arms to rest himself. He began to think that he should have to let the dog drop unless he wished to drop himself. The dusty acrid smell of the ivy was mingled with the smell of the seaweed coming up from the floor of the Tol in a scent that he felt he should never forget all his life. Now and then a wild bee would buzz round the already faded heads of flowers in search of late honey, and the contrast between his own sweating progress and the easy flight of the little insect filled him with a desperate envy. Once, groping for support, he plunged his hand into the long deserted nest of a blackbird, and the feel of the cold crackling eggs startled him like the bite on an animal. At last, he wondered how, he reached a grassy ledge whence onward the ascent was no longer sheer. Carrots finding that she could once more make use of her four legs scrambled up ahead of him and, long before her rescuer was sufficiently recovered to continue the ascent, she was tearing round her little mistress in mad circles of delight.

It was Vivien Romare who was the first to realize that the rescue of Carrots had cost him a tremendous effort, and it was the tone of her voice calling over the edge to ask if he was all right that suddenly made it seem worth while to climb on for ever merely to hear from time to time that sweet sound floating to him on the gentle air. The rest of the ascent would really have been a trifle if he had not been so utterly exhausted by hoisting the dog up the ivy. But aching arms and legs exaggerate difficulties, and Deverell found that he wanted still to claw his way up, a foot at a time. Each tuft of herbage seemed horribly frail, and he had by now lost so much of his confidence that he preferred to grasp the brambles rather than let go of the earth for a moment. His knees were afire from the way he dug them into the cliff, regardless of stones. His face was stung by nettles in his unwillingness to put too great a strain on his feet by assuming a less prostrate position. But at last, wet with perspiration, smeared with mould, stained by grass, blistered by nettles, torn by brambles, grazed by jagged stones, he reached the hillside, and lay listening to his coursing veins and

thumping heart, incapable of any thought but the pleasure of lying on his back and staring up at the sky through a filigree of brown fern.

"I'd better scoot back and get some water," he heard Venetia say.

"What are you going to bring it in?" her sister was asking.

"Oh bother! I haven't got anything, have I? I don't suppose my shoe would hold it. My shoes let in plenty of water, but I expect they'd let it out just as fast, which would be somewhat of a failure."

"Don't bother, Venetia," Deverell murmured.

She plunged down beside him and seized his hand.

"Oh, I say I am most frightfully sorry. Do let your eyes beam upon me in Christian charity!"

"It wasn't your fault in the least," he assured her, smiling. "I thought it looked an easier climb than it was."

Then suddenly he realized that on his other side the haughty elder sister was kneeling and watching him with an expression of grave concern. On an impulse he put out his left arm, which was the wounded one, and took her hand.

"Please don't worry. Please! I'll be perfectly all right in a moment. I assure you I shall."

Lying there on the steep slopes of Carrackoon the young lieutenant felt that, while he held the hands of the two sisters, he was perfectly linked in communion with earth and sea. Venetia's hot boyish hand was a symbol of earth. Her hazel-green eyes told him of earth; her freckles, her red-brown hair, her milk-white skin, even her frock faded to the greyish mauve of plummy grasses—all spoke to him of earth. She was the incarnate spirit of this island soil. She was the bracken and the breeze, the honeysuckle clinging to the ground, the gorse, the heather and the stripling pine, the wren that fluttered from crevice to crevice of the windswept granite walls. But the other's cool girlish hand was a token of the sea that wore these islands on its breast. She was the spindrift and the spume, the pebbled rill, the fronded pool, the rose-pale shell upon the shore, the glacid wave, the arrowy tern.

Deverell opened his eyes again. He began to feel that it was really time to pull himself together and emerge from this labyrinth of metrical fancies. Relinquishing abruptly both hands, he declared that he must now go and investigate the housing of Private Flanark and Private Mackilligin.

"I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself, Miss Romare."

Venetia threw herself back in an ecstasy of laughter.

"Oh, I say, don't call her that!" she cried.

"I was nearly calling her Melusine," he admitted.

"It's strange you should say that, because Melusine is one of our family names," Vivien said.

"Oh, yes, we've had a lot of fishy ancestors," Venetia put in.

"And we take the names in turn," Vivien went on. "But it was my turn to be called Vivien."

"Yes," said Venetia, "but Vivien's daughter can be called Melusine, that is if she bags it first, which she probably will, because she's practically eight years older than me. Then I'll have to call my eldest daughter Finguala, which will be all right so long as she doesn't want to be a girl guide, which I hope she won't. Little beasts! I hate them, don't you? All fat calves and bunchy pockets."

By this time they were walking back toward the house in single file so that Venetia who was in front had to shout back over her shoulder her criticism of the modern little girl's martial ardour.

Deverell wished that Miss Romare herself would express her dislike of such a formal address. But she walked on before him in silence, and by now to call her Vivien was too serious a step to be taken at the bidding of her young sister. People called each other by their Christian names these days without any imagination of the intimacy that was thereby implied. He was glad that she had not lightly told him to call her 'Vivien.' She had not reproved Venetia for the suggestion, which showed that she could contemplate it. At the same time by her silence she had shown that she was not yet ready to be called 'Vivien' by him. But the moment would come. Deverell for all his fatigue found that the cliff path possessed an extraordinary elasticity as he walked along dreaming of that moment. And then suddenly he realized that for quite five minutes he had lain back against the slope and held her hand. An almost intolerable elation hugged him into breathlessness.

"Why, I love her—I love her—I love her——!"

He stopped in dismay, blushing wildly. But Vivien was walking along before him easily and coolly. Then he could not really have shouted the words—even though the echo of them was still ringing from every rock, even though he could hear them singing in the tide and sighing through the air.

But it was impossible to keep silence. He must either shout or faint. He spied in the path a large stone and picking it up he swung

it high toward the glittering sea, and as it left his hand he shouted at the top of his voice:

"For ever!"

The two girls turned round in amazement.

"I was seeing if my arm was less stiff," he explained with a certain amount of embarrassment.

"Well, it was a jolly good throw," said Venetia in grave appreciation. "It went right into the sea."

"I wonder if that stone will be happier there than it was here," said Deverell.

"Oh, I've never thought about that when I've chucked stones into the sea," Venetia exclaimed. "Well, it'll be a change for it after lying here so long. But I hope it won't want to get back. Because it'll probably be in the sea now till the end of the world."

"I wish my future could be settled as easily," Deverell sighed to himself. He longed for Vivien to look back at him; yet he dreaded her doing so, because she would know at once that he loved her, and were that knowledge displeasing she would turn back into that cold ghost of a girl who such a little time ago had come down those steps with lilies in her arms.

"Your lilies," he said. "You mustn't forget them."

They had reached the glade at the foot of the hanger; and when Venetia hurried on ahead to see if Hamblyn had brought the *Mermaid* round, Vivien diverged down the steps.

There were the lilies scattered under the ilex on the other side of the parapet where she had tossed them when she heard her little sister calling. He vaulted over to gather them up and give them back to her.

"You said you wouldn't be friends on Roon," he reminded her. "But you will now, won't you?"

"Why, of course," she murmured. "I'm sorry I was so tiresome when we first met."

"But you had every right to be—I mean to say, you weren't at all tiresome. But I'm sure I was. It wasn't exactly that I was shy, I don't think I was a bit shy . . ." he broke off. "Oh, well, I vote we don't remember what we were."

They stood there on the steps where they met, looking at each other across the crimson lilies; and their cheeks were hardly less crimson than the flowers.

"What is the history of this abandoned house?" he asked. It was not that he was really very anxious to know, because whatever the

house had been in its prime it could never have been so rich as it was now in its ruin. But he wanted to keep her lingering here for a little while.

"It was built by my great-great-grandfather when Carrackoon was always held by us on a lease from the Palatinate. Of course it ought to have been ours as much as Roon, but there was a law-suit and our title could not be proved, so that we always had to pay a nominal rent. Then my great-grandfather owned a privateer in the French wars, and afterwards he used it for smuggling on his own account. One of his crew informed against him, and the lease of the island was taken away from us. He was so angry that he cursed the house and said that no one except a Romare who lived in it after him should ever be sure that his door was shut. And every tenant who lived here has found that come to pass. Then about ten years ago an Englishman decided to turn the old stables into a house, because the Palatinate wouldn't do anything to keep the old house in repair. Since then it has gradually fallen to pieces; but even now they say that if you shut the doors they always fly open again. The German who lived here said it was the wind. He was rather a dear old thing. We were sorry for him when he was turned out. My father tried to get the lease again, but the Controller of the Palatinate says nothing can be done about it till the war is over."

"How I'd love to be here!" Deverell exclaimed.

"Well, don't tell my father that," she laughed.

"Oh, of course if he wanted it, I shouldn't think of trying to get hold of it."

"I'd rather like to live here myself one day," she said dreamily.

"Would you? Would you really?" he pressed.

But before she could say any more Venetia's voice was heard shouting the news of the *Mermaid's* arrival.

"She didn't run down the steps as if she wanted to be gone," he thought. "But rather as if she enjoyed the light feeling of the ground under her feet."

Whereupon he ran down after her without noticing that there were any steps at all.

"Are you coming back with us?" Venetia asked, her hazel eyes turning quickly from him to Vivien, and from her back to him again.

Deverell hesitated. It was horribly difficult to refuse, but he felt that he ought to see about the men's quarters, and after telling

young Harvey to meet him it might look conspicuous to return with the girls.

"No, I'm afraid I'll have to hang about here a bit longer. I'll see you on Roon perhaps?"

"Very soon," Venetia promised.

"Do 'ee mind if I send Boy Alec for 'ee in the cockle, sir? 'Tis calm enough," said Hamblyn, whose large face was smooth and mellow with benevolence.

"I should prefer to come back in the cockle. I'll be ready in half an hour or so."

Venetia took one of the oars, and Deverell pushed the dinghy off, waiting on the beach till they had climbed aboard the *Mermaid*. As the boat swung round toward the harbour of Roon Vivien, with one hand on the tiller, waved a spray of lilies with the other, while Venetia, who had huddled down in the stern of the dinghy to enjoy the excitement of being towed back, expressed in her attitude a profound satisfaction with the success of her plot.

Deverell found that the cottage would serve excellently for Private Flanark, Private Mackilligin, and the gramophone; but he resented now more than ever the necessity of inflicting their presence upon the island.

"So long as war was the amateur sport of kings there was something to be said for it," he thought. "But as a professional sport for democracies it is the most damnable amusement ever conceived."

He was walking up the little lane behind the cottage, which led directly to the top of the island. On one side was the hanger, with its tiers of thickly planted trees, the slimmest of them hoary with the glaucous lichen it wore against the salt winds, at the bottom which like a jewel beheld thus glowed the little garden. On the other side above a heathery bank honeycombed by rabbits the lush bracken of the northerly slopes arched over in a green wave. There was more room on the top than he had expected—nine or ten acres of level country which had evidently once been arable, although long abandoned to the heather and the squalid wood-sage, to sprawling pimpernel and coarse tufts of couch. In the middle of the field an oblong monolith of granite marked the highest point of Carrackoon. He supposed at first that this had been placed there, but a closer inspection showed that it was surrounded by a circle of barren ground and was merely an outward demonstration of the rock that lay just below the surface.

Standing beside this solitary stone Deverell possessed a view that

was worthy of his own elated state of mind. Whichever way he turned, the rim of the land was bounded by the sea; whether northward it was royal blue against the dingy salmon of the faded heather and the green cone of Merg rising in the foreground; or whether southward it spread in a sheet of silver beyond a grey wall and the dark battlements of Mab, the brother of Merg; or whether westward above the gorse and granite it shimmered in palest azure; or whether eastward with peacock hues it rippled between the rounded tree-tops of the wood and the spangled haze of Penzawn. But in all that wide view Deverell's eyes saw only the outflung line of Roon, and on Roon only the two or three chimneys and shreds of roof visible among the trees that sheltered Romare's House.

"Will it ever come to pass?" he asked aloud.

The monolith of granite against which he was leaning seemed to quiver in response. He could almost fancy that it breathed like the old saurian it resembled, with the lizard-skin of minute lichens that mottled its surface.

"But everything becomes alive when one is as much in love as I am," he cried in triumph.

Then with wild shouts he ran down the lane toward the sea. The pine-cones crackled beneath his feet; and among the trees the sober-suited blackbirds protested shrilly against the disturbance.

Boy Alec was waiting for him with the cockle drawn up on the beach. The stretch of sand had long been covered, and the tide was swirling through the channel between Merg and Carrackoon. Rowing back to Roon like this on the flood expressed the fullness of his heart, which scarcely more than three hours ago had been at such a dead ebb.

8

HEAVY SEAS

Dick Deverell did not see the girls again for some time after that adventure in the Tol of Carrackoon. He was not much about during the daytime, this being his week to be on guard at night. He hoped that he should soon be able to trust his men to do their duty and behave themselves, but for the present they required an eye upon

them all the while. Sergeant Gusborne was useless as a disciplinarian without ever giving his commanding officer an opportunity to get rid of him for some flagrant lapse. He was one of those tipplers who are never actually sober, but at the same time seldom obviously drunk; and Deverell was always waiting for the moment to arrive when he would have taken one drink too many to be able any longer even to pretend that he was in complete possession of his faculties. He was a florid, well-set-up man, with a salute and puttees that were smart enough; but all his outlines, mental and physical, were just perceptibly blurred, tremulous and uncertain.

The weather broke up soon after Private Flanark, Private Mackilligin, and the gramophone had been deposited on the island of Carrackoon to protect it against the Central Powers. Sergeant Gusborne, who was acting as a most inefficient quartermaster, made such a muddle of the supplies that when the garrison was cut off from Roon for a week they nearly starved. At any rate, that was the way the garrison regarded its ordeal. Actually it was only deprived of bread, butter, sugar and tinned milk. When Deverell and the sergeant at last managed to land with fresh supplies they found Private Flanark and the gramophone waiting for them on the beach.

"Is Mackilligin on guard?" Deverell asked.

"No, sir. He's in bed, sir," Private Flanark replied in an injured voice. "He's too weak to get up, poor feller! We ain't had no butter not since Friday, and he ain't bin able to drink nothing only water, because we run out of sugar las' Thursday. We bin starving, sir."

"But you had plenty of biscuits and bully beef."

Private Flanark looked reproachfully at his lieutenant.

"Oh, we had biscuits and bully beef, yes. Well, if we hadn't have had, we've both have bin dead by now. Fancy, no sugar not since Thursday, sir! I never had nothing like that happen to me before, sir. It's properly put me all ends up, as you might say. I'm all of a blessed shake."

Sergeant Gusborne, whose inside had been most unpleasantly shaken by the tossing he had received in the *Mermoid* over the mile of water between Roon harbour and Carrackoon, was not inclined to tolerate a rival in shakiness.

"Why didn't you put the jam in your tea?" he growled. "Jam'll sweeten tea the same as sugar."

"But we never had no bread and butter, sergeant. I keep telling you, don't I? Well, Mackilligin, he give up hope and took to his bed, and when I put on the gramophone for him last night and

played 'Home, Sweet Home,' he burst out crying like a lil' child, he was that overgone by what we was suffering."

Deverell had to turn away his face and smile broadly before he was able to summon up sufficient gravity to ask Private Flanark in a stern voice why if he was strong enough to carry his gramophone down to the beach he had left his rifle in the cottage.

"But I knowed it was you, sir. Certingly, if I'd have thought for one moment, sir, as it was the enemy, I'd have been waiting for 'em to keep 'em off landing."

Deverell decided that it was useless to attempt to turn his men into professionals, and he resigned himself to making the best of a comic opera command. He threatened, however, that if he was ever given a second taste of this malingering he should in future garrison Carrackoon with one man and not relieve him for a week.

A day or two later, on a gusty and menacing afternoon, M.L. 1958 put into Roon harbour, the skipper of which, a young R.N.V.R. lieutenant, came ashore and presented Deverell with this note:

From *Lieut.-Col. J. S. Manton,*
O.C. Lyonesse Coastal Defences,
To *Lieut. R. V. Deverell,*
O.C. Roon.

You will proceed immediately to Penzawn and report why no report has been received from you at headquarters for over a week.

"Can you take me back to Penzawn with you?" Deverell asked angrily.

"I can take you over. But I can't bring you back, I'm afraid. I must get on round to Porthmear to fill up before going out to-night—that is if we do go out. The glass is falling all the time. We're in for some dirty weather."

Hamblyn was as willing as the skipper of the M.L. to take Deverell over; but he would not guarantee to bring him back that day.

"You'd never be able to land at the steps, sir, with the sea that'll be running in another hour or two."

Deverell wondered what to do. Had this question arisen when he first came to Roon he would have paid no attention to Colonel Manton's order and risked losing his command. But now it seemed wiser to propitiate him.

"All right, Hamblyn, if you can't get over, you'll have to fetch me to-morrow, that's all."

"I think I should have let your old man go on wondering what you were doing," said the skipper of the M.L., evidently much diverted by his passenger's efforts to remain upright on the way over.

"I wish I could talk to him in this liner of yours," Deverell answered. "But I don't know . . . he's probably not capable of reason."

"Pretty nice job, though, that of yours, isn't it?" asked the skipper.

Deverell nodded.

"Yes, it's a good billet."

"What are the natives like? I heard old Romare had rather a good-looking daughter."

Deverell frowned.

"I haven't seen much of Sir Morgan or the family yet. Too busy getting my men into some kind of shape."

"Quite," said the skipper wisely. "Well, I'll drop in again sometime if I can and you shall take me out to tea. I'm tired of women myself, but my sub is a bit of a lad. He's asleep at present."

"Asleep?" Deverell repeated in some astonishment. "I shouldn't have thought he could stay in his bunk long enough to fall asleep, in this sea."

"Oh, he'd sleep anywhere. Well, I'm sorry I can't run you back to your island. See you again some day. So long."

The M.L. drew alongside the quay of Penzawn harbour, and before Deverell was halfway to Colonel Manton's headquarters she was out of sight.

The weather was similar to that in which Deverell had arrived in Penzawn just over a fortnight ago, but whereas then the islands had seemed fantastic and almost unimaginable, it was now Penzawn that struck him as unreal. That people could live in this huddle of houses, that people, even in fine weather, could bring themselves to walk up and down this absurd promenade, that people could tolerate the sound and sight of these motor-cars filled him with a pitiful admiration in which was mixed a good deal of contempt.

"Ah, good afternoon; I've been getting anxious about you," Colonel Manton was saying before Deverell had recovered from the strangeness of Penzawn.

"I'm sorry, sir, but communication with the mainland has been impossible for the last week . . . and in any case there was nothing of interest to report."

"That is not the point, Deverell. My orders to you were definite. You were to send me a written report at least once a week."

"Yes, sir, I quite understood; and if the weather had not been so violent you would have received my report."

"Then how is it I haven't received it?" Colonel Manton demanded, his eyes swelling like small balloons inflated by his own importance.

Deverell braced himself to keep his temper.

"I thought I had explained, sir, that the weather had been too bad for the Roon boat to cross."

"The weather too bad?" Colonel Manton ejaculated. "Why, good lord, my dear fellow, I've not missed a single game of golf the whole of this week! There was no difficulty, was there, about my orders going over to you? But you can't expect me to be always worrying the naval people to play postman. I thought I'd made it clear to you how anxious I was to avoid bothering them more than could possibly be avoided? Well, I don't want to make too much of this matter, but another time I shan't be able to take quite such a lenient view of what looks rather like slackness, I'm afraid."

"But I think you ought to understand some of the conditions which make the boat service at Roon . . ."

"Put them down in your next report," the Colonel interrupted. "You young temporary officers haven't had time to realize that you can't do things in the Army the way you're accustomed to do them in civil life. *We* want to get things down in black and white. If you've anything to tell me about the boats at Roon, put it down in a report. Then I know where I am. How do you suppose I should be able to look after the coastal defences if my subalterns came rushing in at all hours of the day to tell me this, that, or the other about their jobs? However, don't be discouraged; I dare say before the war is over you'll have shaken down into soldierly ways? We're not through yet, Deverell. We've got to kill a lot of Germans yet. Of course the French are keeping us back a lot, I'm afraid. And the Navy . . ." He shook his head. "And then these infernal politicians! Fellows like Winston, don't you know. Fellows with ideas! Good lord, you don't want ideas in war-time. You want shells and guns and men. I'm not a pessimist,

but I doubt if this war will be over much before 1920 at the earliest."

"As soon as that?" Deverell asked in a tone of what he hoped was not a too obviously sarcastic astonishment.

"You think it'll last longer?" said the Colonel hopefully. "Well, it may do."

"I don't see why it should ever stop," said Deverell.

"Ah, of course, that's exaggerating a bit. Never's a long time. Still . . . I've always said that we haven't really begun yet."

"No, that's true," Deverell agreed fervidly.

"I see you take a long view of matters. Have a cigarette?"

The Colonel was becoming so cordial that Deverell was afraid he should have to spend the rest of the afternoon listening to his eager pessimism about the war.

"Well, sir, if there's nothing else you have to tell me I think I'd better be going down to the harbour to see if there are any signs of the Roon boat coming over to fetch me back."

"Didn't you come over in the Roon boat?"

"No, sir. I came over in the M.L."

"Then why on earth don't you go back in the M.L.?"

"The skipper couldn't hang on, sir."

"But if you knew that, why didn't you come over in the Roon boat? Having waited over a week for your report I could have waited another hour or so."

"It was doubtful if the Roon boat could get over, sir," Deverell said, praying under his breath for patience.

"But if you are depending on an unseaworthy craft, Deverell, you should have reported that to me, and I would have taken the matter up with Sir Morgan Romare. He has no business to palm off an unseaworthy boat on the military authorities. Damn it, a fellow like that ought to be proud to do his bit like the rest of us."

"The boat is perfectly seaworthy, sir, but the harbour at Roon dries . . ."

"What do you mean 'dries'? A harbour is either a harbour or it isn't a harbour. You see, you don't write down any of these facts, which are very important, and so I don't know where I am."

"It's mentioned as drying at half tide in the *Sailing Directions*, sir."

"But what on earth have I got to do with sailing directions? My intelligence reports are not passed on to the Admiralty."

General Firebrace, the new D.H.I., made a great point of that. He told me when he was down here last month that none of the reports passed in to M.I. 14.b went to any other department. There was a great strafe over it with the Home Office, but the D.H.I. had his way. 'My job is to get on with the war,' he said to them, 'not spend my life writing reports for civil servants to query.' A deuced good answer too, and as he had good friends on the I.G.S. he got his own way. But to come back to this so-called harbour. Isn't there any other place where you can get in or out of a boat?"

"Yes, sir, in calm weather we use the steps, but with a southerly or sou'-westerly wind the swell is too heavy to embark or disembark there."

"I'm afraid that Sir Morgan and his boatmen have been taking advantage of your innocence, Deverell. You can't tell me that people have been living on that island all these years without being able to get there and back when they wanted to. You must assert yourself. Don't be afraid. I shall support you. This shilly-shallying about with boats must stop at once. Send in a report as soon as you get back, and I will see to it myself that Sir Morgan receives a serious warning about his obstructive behaviour. We shall have to teach him that there's a war on. Well, if you want to go and look for this boat, I won't keep you. How are your men shaping?"

Deverell was on the point of saying that he had never seen a worse trained, less disciplined, more incapable squad in his life; but common sense urged him to be tactful, and he bit the words back.

"They will settle down gradually, sir. Of course, they're not very first-class material." He could not resist saying as much as this.

Even Colonel Manton was not prepared to be enthusiastic about the Umpteenth Palatinate Light Infantry, and he allowed the criticism to pass with no more than a pompous cough.

There was no sign of the *Mermaid* on the stormy Sound of Roon, and the white saw of foam that was fretting the Rosevean cliffs looked hopeless for his chance of getting back there to-night. However, partly because he did not relish the idea of leaving his men for a night in charge of Sergeant Gusborne, but chiefly because he was himself exasperated by the prospect of spending even another hour in the neighbourhood of Colonel Manton, he tried to

persuade one of the fishermen to make an attempt to take him over. It cost five pounds and a very long argument before he was successful. The sea was getting worse all the time. The uneven bottom of the Sound produced nasty overfalls when the ebb was running against the wind which, with the heavy seas a-beam, made Deverell appreciate the anxiety of the M.L. to make Porthmear as soon as possible. He wished that he had Colonel Manton on board with him. These stinging douches of salt water would spoil his eye for a month of golf. As the island drew nearer, the breakers round Rosevean seemed to grow much larger proportionately than the cliffs, at which they were clawing like furious ghosts.

"You'll never get ashore, sir," said the skipper of the small lugger which had ventured forth with this extravagant young soldier.

"How close in dare you go?"

"If the anchors hold I might stand in to nigh a quarter of a cable."

"Near enough for them to get a line to us from the shore?"

The skipper laughed contemptuously.

"If they could fling a line that far, what good would it do 'ee?"

"Why, I'd make a shot at getting through the surf."

"You would, would 'ee? Well, you might so well get 'un to heave a line from Kingdom Come straight away to wanst. You're talking a bit light, sir. I warned 'ee afore ever we put out I'd never be able to put 'ee ashore, but you was so mad to come I just obleeged 'ee."

"You couldn't beach her?" Deverell suggested with an envious look at the level shore in front of the now completely dry harbour.

The expression of sorrowful contempt on the skipper's face made his passenger feel as stupid as Colonel Manton on the subject of boats and their capabilities.

"I could beach her if you liked to pay for a new boat."

"How much would a new boat like yours cost?"

Deverell was so completely obsessed by the notion of getting back to Roon to-night that he actually was considering in his mind the possibility of wrecking the lugger.

"It 'ud cost 'ee the better of a thousand pounds these days, and that not counting the compensation I'd want for my livelihood."

"Hum—yes—I suppose I can't do that."

"No, sir, you can't and that's sure."

"Oh, very well," Deverell said in despair. "I suppose we must go back to Penzawn."

He strained his eyes for a glimpse of Vivien through the driving spray. But Roon looked empty, grey, and forbidding in the fading light of the storm-dark afternoon.

"I suppose you couldn't land me on Carrackoon?" he ventured, salving his own conscience for such an impracticable solution by assuring it that here would be an excellent opportunity to test his sentries' attention to signals.

"No, sir, I could *not*," the skipper declared. "And if you'll use your eyes, sir, you won't need to ask such questions. Now, sir, by your leave I'll go about. Stand by there! Mind your head, sir! Dirty weather as ever I see'd," he added in obvious satisfaction at the accomplishment of the manœuvre and the sight of the mainland through the quivering forestays of the *Anna Maria*. Poor Dick Deverell was reminded of childhood's despair when the holidays were over and one sat in a corner of the railway carriage watching the houses approaching through the telegraph wires.

The attempt had cost him five pounds. He was soaked to the skin. There was no Venetia in the Queen's Hotel. The glass dropped every time he tapped it. He might be stuck in Penzawn for several days. His tobacco was unsmokable.

And all this was due to an elderly dug-out's desire to be assured that the Germans had not landed on Roon last week.

"I'll be a fossil myself before this cursed war is over," he groaned.

The next day it blew harder than ever. There was no sign of the *Mermaid*, and though Deverell tried to persuade his friend of yesterday to take him across on the flood for ten pounds so that he could land at the harbour the offer was declined.

"I oughtn't to have taken 'ee out yesterday afternoon, sir, but that was calm beside what it is to-day. I wouldn't cross not for a hundred pounds."

In a state of exasperation the commandant of Roon went round to see Colonel Manton.

"Good gracious, Deverell," he exclaimed. "What have you come over again about?"

"I've not been able to get back yet. I hope, sir, you'll try as far as possible not to fetch me across to see you unless you can make proper arrangements to get me back. I've no confidence in the sergeant you gave me; he's not fit to be trusted with a set of

men like that, and if anything has happened on Roon while I'm away I cannot be held responsible."

"Who wishes to hold you responsible?" Colonel Manton asked in majestic displeasure. "If your men have not conducted themselves in soldierly fashion while you have been in Penzawn, send me a full report of their behaviour when you get back, and I will go into the matter."

"I spent five pounds on trying to cross yesterday, sir. I intend to claim for that," said Deverell hotly.

"I shall disallow it at once. Five pounds is an absurd sum to spend on a boat to Roon. Nobody objects to reasonable travelling expenses, but these are not reasonable. I shall not initial them. You were sent down to me as a young officer likely to suit the post I had in mind for you. Come, come, thanks to me you have secured a job that anybody would envy. Do your best with it, Deverell; and don't put me under the unpleasant necessity of writing to Colonel—er—well, you know who I mean—that I cannot speak very highly of his choice."

It was really ridiculous to try to argue with men like Colonel Manton. And with all that Roon might give him it was better to be tactful.

"I'm sorry, sir, that you have formed such a poor impression of me," he said.

"All right. We'll start afresh," said the Colonel graciously. "And now you'd better get along down to the harbour and see about getting back. These Penzawn fishermen seem difficult at first, but it's surprising how quickly they respond to a little pertinacity. I'm sure I don't know what state the coastal defences would have been in by now if I hadn't made up my mind at the very start not to be beaten. Good morning, and don't let this delay in sending in your weekly report cause another muddle like this."

Two more dreary days dragged by before the *Mermaid* was able to get over and take the commander of the garrison back to his post.

9

THE OLD INN

The sea was like tinfoil when the *Mermaid* at last arrived, and Hamblyn was extremely apologetic for not having come over before.

"Oh, I quite understand it was impossible," Deverell replied. "I tried to get back that same afternoon, but as soon as we got near Rosevean we saw that landing was out of the question."

"That *was* you, then, in that lugger about four o'clock?" Hamblyn exclaimed. "So, Miss Vivien was right. I argued her out it weren't never you, and she said she could see you so plain as sixpence."

The *Mermaid* was skimming the water like a flying-fish when Hamblyn said this. Why, it was worth spending a month cut off in Penzawn to hear such news. But the next item with which Hamblyn entertained his passenger brought the *Mermaid* down with a bump again.

"We had a bit of trouble to the Inn las' night," he said portentously.

"Oh, what was that?"

"Well, sir, one of your men got a bit obstropulous and there was a bit of a set to between him and Sam Hockin who serves the drinks. There was a tidy bit of glass scat up, I believe. Of course, I don't hardly ever go to the Inn myself, so I can't give you all the rights of the story. You'd be surprised how quick a tale goes round a little place like Roon and how quick small things do become marvels the like of which no man hath seen. That's why I'm glad I can call myself a strick teetotaller."

Lived ever the man who drove a car or the man who steered a boat that did not regard the blue ribbon with as much pride as he would have regarded the medal of the Royal Humane Society?

Deverell did not question Hamblyn any further, but his heart was full of foreboding for the rest of the voyage across, and the sight of the bracken on the Roon cliffs which the drenching rains of the last three days had dyed to an even richer chestnut was spoilt by the view of Sergeant Gusborne's solemn face and flabby lips waiting for him on the pier.

"I've had to put Private Wilkins under arrest, sir, for disorderly conduct in the execution of his military duties until such time as you returned."

Deverell walked wearily along to the barracks, where the offender was brought before him to hear the sergeant's account of his misdeeds.

"Last night Private Wilkins and Private Wilson being on duty watching the east approaches to Roon from eight p.m. to midnight, Private Wilson—I beg pardon, sir, Private Wilkins I should say—Private Wilkins said to Private Wilkins—Private Wilson I should say—Private Wilkins said to Private Wilson he was going into the Inn to have a drink."

Private Wilkins, who during the sergeant's monotonous recitation was standing at an exaggerated attention, with a much discoloured nose, a black eye, and a cross of sticking-plaster on his forehead, turned up his eyes to heaven at this point as if to imply a profound despair of human falsity.

"Don't throw yourself about like that, Wilkins," said his lieutenant irritably. "You'll be given an opportunity of telling your story presently."

"Thank you, sir," said Wilkins in a voice of mournful gratitude.

"Go on, sergeant."

"Private Wilson refused to accompany him against orders."

This was too much for the alleged tempter, who burst in:

"And which is a lie! Didn't Wilson say he wouldn't come on in himself, but if I liked I could pass him one through the window? Of course he did."

"Silence! I've told you that you'll have an opportunity of giving your version presently."

"Well, sir, it's hard to have to stand here and listen to anyone swearing anybody's life away the same as what Sergeant Gusborne's doing for me."

"Go on, sergeant."

"Private Wilson—I mean Private Wilkins . . ."

"There you are, sir. He don't know which is which. What did I tell you?"

"Look here, my lad, if you can't stop interrupting, I'll have to pack you over to Penzawn and hand you over to the Military Police."

"I'm very sorry, sir. But it's hard, sir. It's cruel hard to hear so many lies told about me and me not able to open my mouth."

"Go on, sergeant."

"Private"—the sergeant took a deep breath and frowned at the offender—"Private Wilkins said he didn't give a B.D. what Private Wilson did, as he meant having a drink. On receiving this comment from Private Wilkins, Private Wilson turned round and said he was going to proceed up the road towards Rosevean steps, and if Private Wilkins didn't come with him it would be the worse for him."

"And what did Wilson call *me*, sergeant? Didn't he call me a D.B.B. and more, so as somebody opened the window and hollered out who was there? Of course he did! On'y you've got it in for me, and so Wilson's got to talk like a angel and a clergyman rolled into one."

"Go on, sergeant. I wish you'd hold your tongue, Wilkins," Deverell sighed. "You don't do yourself any good by these interruptions."

"Shall I go on, sir?" the sergeant inquired with excessive politeness, the effect of which was slightly marred by a too active hiccough.

"I told you to, didn't I?" Deverell snapped.

"After parting with Private Wilkins, Private Wilson proceeded to enter the bar."

"Tut-tut!" this from the accused in bitter contempt.

"I should say Private Wilkins proceeded to enter the bar, and demand a double whisky hot with lemon. Mr. Hockin, the gentleman who serves the drinks to Sir Morgan's employees, answered very civil as he had orders not to supply the sentries on duty. 'You B.B.,' Private Wilkins bellered out. 'I'll have my B. drink and you'll B. well give it to me.' 'I B. well won't,' Mr. Hockin replied. I beg pardon, sir. 'I won't,' Mr. Hockin answered very civil and collected. On that Private Wilkins proceeded to fix bayonets and start in prodding at every glass in the room. I heard the noise and . . ."

"Where were you then?" Deverell asked sharply.

The accused smiled at his lieutenant encouragingly.

"That's right, sir, you ask him again where he was."

"I was in the inner room, sir, me having been invited by Mrs. Hockin to play a game of what they call 'whisk' in these parts, but you'll probably understand me better when I tell you it's what we call 'whist.' There was a lady-friend of Mrs. Hockin, a Mrs. Pascoe from up the hill, and Mr. Jervis, Sir Morgan's head-gardener. . . ."

"Yes," the accused burst in, "and wasn't poor old Pascoe standing about in the rain and wind trying to squint through the blind and see what you was up to with his wife? Of course he was, and didn't I up and challenge him ten minutes before, and didn't he tell me you was all the time hanging around his kitching till he didn't know if it was his kitching or yours? That's why I went in the bar, sir," he continued, turning a triumphant countenance on the judge. "I went in there with the intention of creating, sir, so as the sergeant should come on out of it and show his face like a man. I admit I broke a few glasses, but I never called Sam Hockin a B.B., though perhaps in the heat of the moment I may have called him a B. And I'm perfectly ready and willing to pay for any damage I done. But if I broke a few glasses, that doesn't say Sergeant Gusborne's got the right to knock me about the way he done when they was dragging me back to the barracks. Look at my face, if you don't believe me, sir. What I done, sir, I done for a poor fellow who couldn't stand up for himself and has always been decent and obliging with us chaps and give us extra milk when we arst him, he being cowman to Sir Morgan."

"That's enough, Wilkins," Deverell interrupted. "Your behaviour has been disgraceful. You know quite well that if anything like this had occurred when you were with your regiment, you'd have had a swingeing punishment. I've no opportunity of punishing you here as you deserve, and I ought to send you back to Penzawn. However, I'll give you one more chance. If you have the decency to be grateful and behave yourself for the future, I shan't regret my leniency. You will of course pay for the damage, apologize to Hockin, and for a month from now on the Inn is placed out of bounds for the whole garrison."

"Thank you, sir," said Wilkins, trying to express by the rigidity of his attention his deep appreciation.

"I hope your comrades will be as grateful to you as you are to me," said Deverell drily.

"By the way, sergeant," he added to Gusborne when Wilkins had been dismissed, "that order applies equally to you."

"To me, sir?"

"Certainly."

"I hope you don't think that Private Wilkins's remarks was anything but spite and nastiness, sir?"

"I'm not bothering about Wilkins's remarks. But when you're left in command through my absence you have no business to

indulge in whist-parties. These chaps require a good example. See to it that you set them that example, sergeant."

"Well, sir, you were taking night-duty this week."

"I can't very well look after the men from Penzawn, can I?"

"No, sir, but it seems a bit hard you should pay me out for a party I'd been invited to for my week off."

"There's no need for you to feel injured, sergeant. It will do you no harm to keep out of the Inn for a month. I'm not at all satisfied with you, and unless you can pull yourself together I shall have to send you back to Colonel Manton, who, as you probably know, has no very high opinion of your taste in liquor. That's enough. You'd better take advantage of the weather to visit Carrackoon this morning."

Deverell thought it would be as well to go round that afternoon and put matters as right as he could with Hockin. Of course, it was certain that by now Sir Morgan knew all about last night's scene, and it really was hard luck that just when there seemed a possibility of establishing friendly relations with the family this tiresome fracas should have put everything back. As likely as not Sir Morgan would lodge a complaint with Manton. And that would mean another visit to Penzawn, another hopeless attempt to give his colonel some grasp of the state of affairs on Roon, and probably by the time he returned to Roon another row. Then again if there was anything in what Wilkins had said about Gusborne's behaviour, there was always a likelihood of trouble in that direction. Wilkins could hardly have invented the story about the cowman and his wife unless there had been a good deal of talk about it on the island. It must all help to prejudice Sir Morgan against him, and just now the one man on earth of all others whose good will he coveted was Vivien Romare's father.

Deverell found Sam Hockin less inclined to take a severe view of last night's affair than he had expected.

"Aw, so long as I'm not out of pocket over the broken glass," said Sam, a burly round-faced man whose pink cheeks powdered with mortar dust gave him a complexion as fine as a seventeen-year-old girl's. His rôle of innkeeper was only subsidiary to his real job, which was that of mason for the island. "I haven't said nawthing to Sir Morgan about it. No need to go running to him wi' every little trouble like some of 'em does on Roon."

"I very much appreciate your forbearance," said Deverell.

"Of course, me saying nawthing don't mean as Sir Morgan won't

have had the word," Hockin continued. "There's always one or two of 'em up the hill as takes good keer of that. I do say to my missus sometimes that of all the gossiping backbiting martels anywhere on earth give me up the hill on Roon against the lot."

Deverell was to learn with longer residence that "up the hill" cherished the very same opinion about Bareppa, as the part of Roon near the harbour was called.

The Inn itself was a long substantial granite house with plenty of out-buildings, situated to the south of the harbour with nothing between it and the shore but a narrow strip of lawn dotted with bushes of clipped euonymus from which a flagstaff heavily stayed rose forty feet or more. The road along to Rosevean steps ran behind the Inn which was as pleasant a marine residence as one might find.

"How long is it since it was used properly?" Deverell asked.

"Since it were really an inn, you do mean? Aw, years and years. Not since Sir Morven died—Sir Morgan's father that was. He and his father before him was big men for cock-fighting, and Sir Murdoch built the Inn so as the gentry could come over from the Palatinate and have a bit of sport on the quiet. Pretty goings on there was in them days, I b'lieve. But you ought to get old Mr. Holt to tell 'ee about 'em. There was a lot o' women used to come down summertime from Plymouth and up along. Aw, yes, Roon had a powerful bad name in them days. But haven't you ever seen the old cockpit and the skittle-alley, sir? We do use the skittle-alley for a laundry nowadays and the cockpit's been turned into a coal-store."

Deverell was on the point of accompanying Hockin on a tour of the Inn's antiquities, when one of his men came running along from the barracks to say that the two young ladies from the House wanted to see him. Past and present misdoings at the Inn toppled down into utter unimportance. He hurriedly thanked Sam Hockin for his good nature over last night's unpleasant affair, and strode with seven-leagued boots along the two hundred yards or so between the Inn and the barracks, to where Vivien and Venetia were waiting for him in the road outside, behind them the fringing elms now bare of leaves and the water of the harbour, which was turbid after the storm and leaden-hued under a rubber-grey sky puffed out with livid clouds like the smoke of railway-engines curling round the roof of a London terminus. But as the primrose is more richly painted in dull weather and as bracken is stained a fiercer

auburn by rain so on that dislusted afternoon did the two sisters appear more vivid than he had ever beheld them, even in the pageantry of his thought.

"Hurrah! We've got simply splendid news for you," Venetia cried, running to greet him and seizing hold of his sleeve. "Guess what it is! Oh, well, that isn't quite fair. But next week I shall be thirteen, and of course I shall have a party. Now guess!"

"I'm to be invited?" Deverell asked.

"Vivien, he's guessed right at once!"

The elder sister came forward.

"My father wanted to come down this afternoon and thank you for what you did for our foolish Venetia."

"Oh, Vivien, shut up putting on airs like that. If I was asked to a party like that I'm d'd if I'd go. I'm jolly well d'd if I would."

"Shut up yourself," said Vivien. "You know Father did give me a message."

"Yes, but talking like that about our foolish Venetia, as if you were Mrs. Gatty's Parables from Nature and Charlotte Yonge rolled into one. Don't forget you're still only nineteen, and you're no more Father's prop in his dotage than I am."

Deverell intervened.

"But there was absolutely no need for Sir Morgan to bother himself about coming down. As a matter of fact I was just wondering if I dared venture up to the House and apologize for the tiresome behaviour of my men last night. Oh!" he broke off with a groan.

"Why, whatever's the matter?" Venetia demanded, staring with much concern at Deverell's countenance of woe.

"It's too—too—too——" he stammered in despair.

"I expect you want to say damnable about something, don't you?" Venetia inquired sympathetically. "Well, do say it. Or worse if you like. Vivien doesn't mind. She swore like hell this morning when both suspenders on the right leg burst."

"Venetia, you're not in the least funny when you talk like that," her sister protested. "You've had quite a gratifying success with Mr. Deverell; I shouldn't spoil it by overdoing your bright unconventionality."

Venetia winked at Deverell, but the latter was too gloomy to respond.

"My invite doesn't seem to be much of a success with the military," said Venetia. "I'll have to ask the sergeant who Janie Pascoe's so sweet on. You haven't heard that scandal, have you? Holt told

me last night that Ernie Pascoe was telling Princess—Princess is Ernie's favourite cow—all about Janie's behaviour while he was milking her. He was saying 'Princess, my pretty maid, what would 'ee do if you was I and see'd a great hulking surgent kissing your wife behind the roller-towel?'"

"No, really, Venetia, you oughtn't to talk like that," Vivien said crossly.

"Well, I was only trying to cheer up our brave boys at the front. It's a little discouraging to find one's invite . . ."

"You'll say that one day when you don't mean to, if you aren't careful," Vivien warned her.

"Darling, I don't really very much mind. Mrs. Holt says 'invite.' And Janie Pascoe, and Jenny Hockin, and all the fashionable ladies of Roon. But, dear Mr. Deverell, if thus I may venture to accost you, why, oh why does the idea of coming to my birthday party make you so sad?"

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude."

"I'm sad because I can't come," Deverell groaned.

"Can't come?" both girls exclaimed in simultaneous dismay.

He told them about the row last night and how he had had to punish his men by putting the Inn out of bounds.

"Yes, but what's that got to do with your coming to us?" Vivien asked. "Father knows about the row last night, and he would have come down and asked you himself if he hadn't had a touch of gout."

"Oh, it's nothing to do with your father," Deverell assured them. "It's simply that I can't very well put the Inn out of bounds for a month and then go up and enjoy myself at your party. It wouldn't be playing the game with my men."

Both girls looked as gloomy as Deverell himself.

"Do you think Father would let me invite the whole garrison?" Venetia suggested.

"He might if his gout's better."

"No, really," Deverell said. "I can't tell you how sweet it is of you to think of that. But I couldn't trust my men to behave themselves, and I don't want to spoil everything just when your father's beginning to be a little reconciled to my presence here. I can't tell you how miserable it makes me to refuse. It's just the worst bit

of bad luck that ever happened. But you will ask me again, when the month's penance is finished?"

"Well, of course, one might know that one's thirteenth birthday was bound to be beastly unlucky," Venetia sighed.

"Can't you tell your men that on consideration you've decided to give them another chance?" Vivien suggested.

"They'd only think I was weak," he replied. "No, it can't be helped. It's the greatest disappointment I've ever had. But I must stick to my word, and I must punish myself as well as them."

"And such a day for a disappointment," Venetia exclaimed. "Ugh! the sea's like a great sleek rat."

"I've got to go along now and visit my sentries on the towans," Deverell said tentatively. "I suppose you wouldn't like to assuage my grief by walking there with me. We haven't had a walk yet," he added wistfully.

"Vivien will go with you," Venetia announced. "But I can't, because I've got to give Hockin a message from Holt."

"Well, that won't take half a second," said Vivien nervously.

"Oh yes, it will, because I promised I'd show him just where the wall's down between Big Scowen and the old orchard."

"I think I'd better come with you," Vivien began.

Deverell nearly fainted.

"Don't be silly, Vivien. Even if Holt does say that it takes a cart and horses to drag Hockin up the hill whenever he wants a job of work done on the farm, I can manage him without you. Good-bye, good-bye! Have a good walk. You'll find Vivien much nicer than ever you think she is when she hasn't got me to correct."

"Venetia," her sister begged.

But Venetia had backed away all the time she was talking, and now she turned suddenly and flew off toward the Inn, leaving Vivien and Deverell together. The benedictions he called down upon that small scurrying figure seemed to flutter in her swift wake like golden butterflies.

"You don't mind walking round the towans?" he said, turning politely to the elder sister.

"No, I should like a walk. The air's awfully heavy, isn't it?"

"Tremendously heavy," he agreed, wondering how he had the nerve to utter such an abominable lie, when the least breath of wind would have blown him like thistledown from one end of Roon to the other.

IO

MELUSINE

When Dick Deverell set out with Vivien Romare along the low road above the eastern shore, he walked in silence at first, straining his mind to evoke the magic phrase that would unlock her heart and admit him here and now to that perfect intimacy for which he longed. Ah, that magic phrase! That revealing sentence! *The dull brain perplexes and retards*. A tolling line of Keats was all that he could think of. He scanned the heavy sky as if there writ in lightnings he could find the password to her soul. He searched the unresponsive melancholy sea, and listened for its cadence in the dry whispering of the canebrake at the road's edge. He turned his eyes inland and scoured the grassy cup of Romare's Punch Bowl that was scooped out of the high ground above the level meadows. He asked the fat-faced cottage that blinked lazily at the sun—when there was any sun—tucked away from the north under the curve of the high land sweeping round beyond the Punch Bowl to follow the course of the road with the wide headland known as Penmarrack. These slopes of Penmarrack abutting upon the path seemed to bring her so much closer to him that the effort to find that elusive abracadabra of a sentence became an even tenser agony. They walked on without a word to break the muteness of a day on which even a dancing stonechat's click sounded like driven nails. After about half a mile of this silent progress they forsook the road, which diverged uphill on the other side of Penmarrack, and passed through a gate opening on the great rectangle of low-lying country that formed the northerly third of Roon. The threshold of this country, which in character was quite unlike any other landscape on the two islands, was a stretch of closely nibbled turf. This was bounded on the sea side by a sandy bank speckled with the saffron beads of irises whose pale-green tufts jagged the low sky line. On the left the turf swept up in billows to a rounded hill on which the isolated bushes of gorse had been so pertinaciously trimmed by rabbits as to give them the appearance of dark junipers on chalky downs; directly opposite the gate rose the tawny cone of a smaller hill. From the rough gap between these two eminences a sandy track wound across an expanse of wide grass, broken here

and there by clumps of the great sea-rush, by brakes of eglantine grey-toothed and coral strung, by bramble-thickets, and the sheen of marshy pools. This hollow of wild pasture-land rose gradually at the east, north and west to a rolling line of dunes high enough to cut off the view of the three long and desolate beaches beyond. In the middle of the northerly line of dunes the seven great menhirs—none of them less than fourteen feet high—known as Romare's Watchmen showed ashen grey beside the darker sea, against one of which a miserable blob of humanity, bold enough now by daylight, was leaning.

"Midgley slacking as usual," Deverell exclaimed.

And this was the magic phrase that was to unlock her heart!

"Midgley's rather a good name for him," Vivien replied. "He doesn't look much bigger than a sparrow from here."

Well, it was done now. Midgley was the last topic he should ever have dreamed would hallow their first walk together. But so it had happened, and the name of Midgley by her immortalized must now go singing on through time with Helen, Isolda, Guinevere and Juliet. If all that he dared to hope should come to pass, years hence he might one day say to her, "Do you remember when we saw Midgley leaning against the menhir on the towans?" as lovers more æsthetically blessed might say, "Do you remember the scent of the pinks along the garden walks that June night?"

They lingered for a few minutes between the two hills to gaze at this wide country so utterly still, yet somehow haggard-seeming.

"Queer the way those mounds of turf, most of them with stones at the top, go up like giant stairs on each," Deverell said, looking at Big Tor and Little Tor as the two hills were called.

"Oh, but those aren't ordinary stones," Vivien told him. "Those are cromlechs. There are seventeen cromlechs in a line from the top of Big Tor to the top of Little Tor. People who know about these things say that once upon a time Roon must have been used as a burial place by great chiefs on the mainland."

"Have you ever opened any of them?"

"Opened the cromlechs?" she echoed in consternation. "Oh, we should never do that! We should bring a curse upon us if we did that. Our house would come to an end."

"I suppose there's some legend about that?" he asked.

"Yes, but even if there weren't, it would be natural, wouldn't it, to dread opening the tombs?"

"Perhaps it would."

"Oh, but of course it would. Think of those great chiefs being rowed across here from Lyonesse to their last resting-place. They must have chosen Roon because they wished to lie here at peace for ever, and they chose it thousands of years before any Romare set foot on the island. It belonged to them before it belonged to us. It belongs to them still."

He shivered. Credible enough on this funereal day was that solemn assertion; and looking at the burial mounds he could fancy that they heaved at the breath of the sleepers within.

"Don't you ever feel that Roon is haunted?" she went on. "I don't mean by the spirits of the dead who lie here, but by the spirits to whom they must have prayed to protect them eternally. Carrackoon isn't haunted like Roon. Didn't you feel the difference over there?"

"It was easier to understand," he agreed. "But didn't you say that Carrackoon *was* haunted?"

"Oh, yes, but only by a perfectly ordinary human ghost—my own great-grandfather—and that's nothing. But these other spirits frighten me. Sometimes I feel that they don't like me. I can never do what Venetia does for instance."

"What does she do?"

"Why, sometimes at night she'll go to the window and listen, and then she'll slip out of the room and wander away for hours. We had a governess who tried to stop her doing that, and the only result of her interference was that the next time Venetia went out she was hidden away for two nights and a day. She was only six at the time, and we were frightened to death."

"Strange you should be telling me that," said Deverell.

"Why?"

"Why, because the other day on Carrackoon I was thinking that Venetia *was* the island. Do you remember when I said I was nearly calling you Melusine?"

She nodded.

"Well, that's because I was thinking at the same time that you were the sea round the island."

Vivien turned her eyes on him, as if startled by the surprise of a secret.

"That was very wise of you. I didn't know you were as wise as that. And that's the reason why the island seems sometimes not to like me. Years and years ago long before the first Knight was

granted Roon by the Earl Palatine to disperse the pirates who were using it in those days, an ancestor of his in the time of King Arthur was wrecked on Roon, and one day, when he was sitting on the sands by Romare's Watchmen, a sea-prince came out of the sea and said to him, 'You shall marry my daughter.' And Sir Morven said that he would, and so the sea-prince called his daughter Melusine from the sea. She was very beautiful with pale golden hair. . . ."

"Like you," Deverell broke in.

"No, please don't interrupt," she said gravely. "But when they were married, Melusine said to him that the reason why her father had wanted them to be married was because he coveted a treasure of fairy gold that was hidden under the seven great stones at the edge of the island, and that only a mortal knight could find this gold. So Sir Morven said that he would search for it at once and give it to the prince, her father, because Melusine was worth all the gold in the earth. 'But alas,' said Melusine when they were alone, 'if you dig up the gold, these stones that guard it will fall and the sea will rush over them and destroy the island and you will be drowned, but I shall go back to my palace under the sea and my father will have his gold.' 'Alas, alas,' sighed the knight, 'and must I lose you, my beautiful Melusine?' And she wept long and bitterly. But the sea-prince rode up on a wave and demanded in a loud voice why she had not brought him his gold. So the knight asked her if she was brave enough to defy her father and escape with him to the mainland. And she said that she was. So they built a boat, and Melusine summoned her own dolphins, and they were carried over to Lyonesse, though the sea-prince, her father, pursued them all the way on a huge white wave. But he could not catch them, because Sir Morven had stuck his dagger in the stem of the boat and the sea-prince feared the cross. And Sir Morven took the sea-princess far away inland, and they lived in a castle in the middle of a great forest. But one day Melusine begged the knight to let her journey down to the edge of the sea, because she was heartsick among the trees. So he let her go, and what happened to her nobody ever knew, but she never came back to her husband or her little boy. And that little boy was my ancestor, and the story of Roon was handed down from generation to generation until the first Knight of Roon came here in the fifteenth century. He remembered about the stones, and he called them Romare's Watchmen, because so long as they stood by the edge of the sea the island

would never be destroyed. And always in our family there comes from time to time a Melusine, though like me she may not be called Melusine. So when you said that to me, it was very strange; and it was strange that you should think I was the sea and that Venetia was the land, because it's true."

Her dreamy voice was still. Her tale was told.

Deverell scarcely dared to break the hush by asking which her brother was.

"Oh, he's both," she declared, her face flushing at the thought of that dear brother. "He just loves the island and he loves the sea round it, but he rather laughs at all these legends. Perhaps you've been wanting to laugh?" she said quickly.

Deverell shook his head.

"They didn't seem like legends. They seemed like simple ordinary facts. After all, you only told me this story because I had already guessed half of it."

"Yes, that's true," she agreed. "It makes me feel sorrier than ever that I was so rude to you at first. But I never imagined that we should have somebody here who would understand us. Besides, I was still terribly upset by Murdo's going away."

"Have you had good news of him?"

"Oh, of course we don't know where he is, but wherever he is it must be horrible. Mr. Deverell, tell me, do you think there's a chance of the war being over soon. It can't go on much longer, can it?"

"Oh no, I think it will be over in the early Spring."

"You were wounded, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was very lucky," he murmured.

They walked along for awhile in silence, their footsteps making no sound on the sandy track.

"Oh, did you see that snipe?" Vivien suddenly exclaimed. "I must write and tell Murdo that we've seen the first of them. He *will* be jealous. Though he nearly always misses a snipe."

She turned pale, and clutched her companion's arm.

"People are much easier to hit than snipe, aren't they?" she whispered.

"Oh, it just depends," he tried to answer cheerfully. "You mustn't think about it too much. Please, Miss Romare, don't. It's no use. When I met your brother on the way here, I couldn't get him out of my head for a long time, I kept imagining that he would have a mother on Roon who would be fretting about his safety."

And I felt such a brute in arriving here when it ought to have been he coming back."

"You're tremendously sympathetic, aren't you?" she said gratefully.

"Well, you see, I've only got myself to think about," he told her. "I have no relations—or at any rate none that is near enough to count. My mother died early on in the war."

"Are you a regular soldier?"

"No, no. I was going to be a barrister. And then I had an idea I might be able to write one day. I haven't given up the idea of writing, but now that I've seen these islands I'm sure I'll never eat another dinner in the Temple. I think I'd like best to go in for growing flowers after the war. But what's the use of making plans until this vile war is over? So much will depend on . . ." he broke off abruptly.

"On what?"

Dare he tell her now that he loved her? But if she were horrified by the news? There was no possible reason to believe that she loved him. Perhaps she was beginning to like him a little, but he should be mad to presume on that.

"On my heart's desire," he said at last, looking away from her to be apparently enthralled by a couple of wheatears that were dipping from tussock to tussock.

"The wheatears stay with us all the winter," she said.

"I don't blame them," he declared fervently.

They had turned aside from the track and were approaching Romare's Watchmen, from the neighbourhood of which Midgley had long vanished, having no doubt observed his lieutenant's approach.

"Fairy gold," said Deverell pensively. "I wonder if it really does lie underneath those stones."

"You weren't thinking of trying to search for it?" she asked in alarm.

"Good gracious, no," he reassured her. "Can you imagine that I could be such a vandal?"

They wandered along the ridge of the towans among the grey-green marram-grass. Their footsteps crackled on the prickly dead stems of burnet roses that here and there in thick mats bronzed the turf, crackled too on the tiny bones and skulls of rabbits and on snail shells wind-dried to a diaphanous lightness, then for awhile moved silently over banks of golden-green moss more vivid than

any carpet of Samarcand. Presently they reached a gully where the sand swept down to meet the sandy shore in a long drift of powdered ivory, fleckless save for the footprints of birds and the faint pectinations of the dying gale. To right and left of them stretched the wide strand on which the sea broke at disjointed intervals with a kind of weary knock as if it were worn out by the furious battering it had given the island during all these days of wind. The solitude was interrupted by the figure of Midgley, who standing with fixed bayonet was regarding with an expression of ferocious concentration an off-shore rock. As Deverell drew near he swung round and yapped a challenge.

"Oh, it's you, sir?" he said, as if his commanding officer were the last being on earth that he expected to traverse this forlorn beach. "I thought I'd seen a subbamarine for a minute, sir. I was just about ready for him if it had have bin one. Cor! he wouldn't half have copped it, sir. He was for it, sir, even if I'd have bin for it myself."

"Anything else to report?" Deverell asked, a laugh tickling his lips.

"No, sir, nothing else. Tut-tut, I'm wrong too. I seen a lemon bobbing along in the water round the corner. But it weren't worth rescuing, sir. I think the crabs had been noring at it, sir."

All this meticulousness about flotsam was due to the fact that the week before Deverell had met two of the sentries carrying back a case of whisky which had been washed ashore on this same beach, and which they were extremely injured to be told was not their perquisite. A lecture on the appropriate moral attitude to be assumed toward flotsam and jetsam had resulted in all kinds of rubbish being brought him for his adjudication, so that he might be impressed by the simple honesty of his men.

"Well, I shouldn't spend the rest of the afternoon staring at that rock, Midgley."

"No, sir, I won't, sir. Only anyone can't be too careful these times, that's what I say, sir. I mean to say, sir, if it *had* have bin a subbamarine, it 'ud have made me look a bit silly if it had have landed without me noticing it. Apps thought he seed an arioplane on'y yesterday. But when he looked again, it appears it was some kind of a bird. But what kind of a bird he couldn't rightly make out. He said, as far as he could figger, it was a kind of a peacock who'd lost its tail. But Haddaway who was in a menargery when they took him for a soldier said it was a crane, because he'd

seen 'em often. Apps was a bit annoyed. 'Think I don't know the difference between a bird and a crane,' he said, 'and me working four years and two months at the docks?' You see, Apps didn't know. . . ."

"Yes, all right, Midgley," Deverell broke in. "And when you're watching the coast you'll find it easier to do so if you don't spend most of the time with your back to it, leaning against those big stones."

Midgley gave a tremendous salute to express his sense of having been scored off, and Deverell turning to Vivien suggested that they should walk back to Greenwater Cove.

"It's not too far for you?" he added apologetically.

"Too far!" she laughed.

"Of course I know it isn't really far, but one's ideas of distance are altered when one lives on an island hardly six miles round."

The encounter with Midgley brought the conversation into the full crudity of the present, and all the way along the towans Deverell was telling Vivien stories about his men. Although she was an excellent audience he had no desire to talk about his men. He wanted to talk about her. But could one seriously discuss the appearance of a sea-prince on this long shore after laughing over Midgley's submarine and Apps's crane?

However, the beach came to an end at last where the north-west slopes of Roon drew near the sea, and he had at any rate the satisfaction of being able to help her over the fence that barred from the towans the narrow footpath turning south along their base.

"This was to keep the sheep from the cliffs," Vivien explained. "But it might as well be pulled down now. Holt loves to make a fortification that one can't get over without tearing one's clothes."

"Still, it's a very good fence. I think it would be rather a pity to pull it down," he said decidedly.

They walked on in single file between bracken as high as themselves, where it had not been beaten down by the gale into soggy brown heaps. Deverell welcomed the silence for which such progress was an excuse. For one thing he could watch Vivien without embarrassing her or himself. For another, he could say over to himself the only words that it would really be worth while saying aloud. "I love you!" His footsteps were moving in triple time to the three monosyllables. "I love you." The stonechats were calling it out in triple clicks. "I love you." The waves were breaking on the rocks twenty feet below in triple splashes. "I love you." Three

rabbits scampering along the path ahead flashed three white scuts. "I love you." The path began to wind upward in a triple curve. "I love you." Three curlews surprised over the brow of the next headland screamed it forth, as they flew in panic out to sea.

Their road now lay through a blackthorn coppice, and Vivien turning round said:

"This is where the tallest foxgloves grow."

It was such a simple piece of information, but it seemed to bring him much nearer to her heart than he had ever been. It made time of no account, so that for that instant he held her close all a Summer's day, while round them a thousand bees rocked a thousand crimson bells high over their heads, a thousand crimson bells ringing from green spires, ringing of love, ringing of Vivien, ringing of life eternally together.

"Can I really pretend any longer that I am not madly in love with her?" he asked himself when she had turned round again, and before him her pale hair was shining like a wintry sunbeam. *This is where the tallest foxgloves grow.* She would surely never have told him that, if she had cared nothing at all about him. It was not the sort of remark you made to people you did not care about. It must have meant that she expected to show him this coppice in Summer. And he had told her quite distinctly that the war would probably be over in the early Spring. Therefore she must have said to herself that he would be here in June, and obviously he would never be here in June unless he loved her. To talk about foxgloves like that would be a mockery unless she imagined he was going to see for himself how tall they grew. And if he did not tell her now that he loved her, she might think that he had only fallen in love with her because he was stuck here with nobody else to fall in love with. It would be absurd to tell her that he had loved her from the first moment he saw her unless he told her now. Yes, but then suppose she was not in love with him? Suppose she had simply told him about those foxgloves because . . . because she was in love with somebody else and was remembering the last time she had walked along this path with him? In dismay at this calamitous fancy Deverell lost the path for a moment and went blundering into the spiky sloes; but none of their thorns stabbed him with such ferocity as his own fancy.

"Where are you going?" Vivien turned round to laugh.

"I dropped my handkerchief," he murmured in confusion. "But of course I ought to have said 'I dropped my heart,' " he added to

himself when once more the wintry sunbeam of her hair glinted before him. A moment later they emerged from the coppice, and Greenwater Cove lay below them.

"This is what I love best in the whole island," Vivien said.

Deverell regarded the cove with as much reverence as such a proclamation demanded.

Not that it required any effort from the dullest vision to admire Greenwater Cove, since it possessed all anybody could imagine that a small cove in a small island ought to possess. It was reached from the top of Roon by a grassy valley that dived down out of what was at first glance a perfectly ordinary field which no one would have suspected of being on the frontiers of fairyland. The slopes on either side of the valley were wooded, but not so thickly as to deprive each tree of its own fantastic shape, for even this comparatively sheltered spot was not immune from that grotesque genius, the sea-wind. These slopes ended in two headlands, both of which were covered with blackthorn. Between them the beach of the cove spread in a shelving crescent to the deep waters of the Atlantic, which on sunny days flowed in emerald over the yellow sand beneath and even on this grey afternoon were a dark bottle-green. A long low islet, which could be reached dry-shod at low spring tides, acted as a breakwater against the full force of the swell. The beach, which had the texture and colour of finely ground macaroons, appeared at a superficial glance to be formed of dry sand; but a closer inspection of this bright crescent shared by green land and green sea revealed that it was composed entirely of shells. They were of every shape and hue and degree of perfection—minute caps of liberty wrought from alabaster lace; fairy horns of ivory rose-dyed where they had touched the lips of their tiny trumpeters; large scallops piebald and iron-grey; infinitesimal fans that flamed against the light with elfin sunsets, and white cups that held in their hollows the flush of elfin dawns; sea-mussels dipped in damson-juice and wine; limpets spotted like pards; diminutive conches carmine-tipped; winkles of orange and citron; winkles of primrose and amber; winkles of cream and fawn, of chestnut, cinnamon and rich mahogany; lavender winkles lilac-slashed and diced with pearl.

"Yes, this is much my favourite place," Vivien said, as through her long fingers she let fall a cascade of these radiant myriads. Then she went on in her dreamy voice that was like the echo of the sea through all these multitudinous shells: "Such a wonderful place.

Oh, by moonlight, when the tide is far out and all the beach sparkles under your feet. And in March when the blackthorn is in blossom. You would think that snow had fallen on the cliffs. And when you walk up Greenwater Valley the path is marked all the way by daisies. You never saw daisies grow so thick. And however dull the day the water is always green." Her voice left the dream with a sigh of a wave turning back from the shore. "Well, now, I think it's time we went home to tea, don't you?" she said.

At the entrance to the valley he turned back to gaze at the track of their footsteps along the beach.

"Look at our footprints," he said. "They criss-cross sometimes like a chain."

She accepted his simile; but he could not buoy himself up with the fancy that she had perceived the significance of the pattern thus intagliated upon the beach.

"And there are daffodils here in March," she went on, pointing to the wooded slopes of the valley, while they walked slowly up into the world again.

"It is rather unkind of you to talk about what will be here when I may be away," he said reproachfully.

"I wasn't thinking of the future," she replied. "I was thinking about the past."

He could not tell her that this was being more unkind, because it would have sounded presumptuous.

"I can't bear to think of the future," she sighed.

Then she was in no mood to hear of love, Deverell thought, and he was glad that he had not been mad enough to risk the throw.

They had climbed up the last steep slope and reached the field. The roof of Romare's House filled the sky.

"Well, this is where our walk comes to an end," he said gloomily.

"Oh, but won't you come and have tea with us? Venetia and I always have tea in our own room."

And when Deverell accepted the invitation, he had an idea that he was standing on his head to thank her.

I I

THE LION AND THE LAMB

All that Winter Dick Deverell never came as near to telling Vivien of his love as he did on that stone-still afternoon when she turned and said how tall the foxgloves grew in the blackthorn coppice above Greenwater Cove. Having failed to quicken that moment with the breath of actual life, he told himself that he would wait now until he could stand beside her among those very foxgloves in their June prime. And if he should not be here in June? It would signify that fortune denied her to him. This was not the faint-hearted quietism it appeared. Did she love him already, she would not love him less for his diffidence. At present, and for as long as the war lasted, he was not a free agent. If she did not love him now, if she could not imagine that she ever would love him, his nearness would be a perpetual irk and embarrassment to her. He had no right to take the risk of that until he was free to leave Roon. It would be unfair to make his official status on Roon an excuse for a clandestine love affair. Even suppose that her father gave his permission for them to be married at once, which was more than improbable, he could not expect to be allowed by his military superiors to treat his wardship of the island as a honeymoon. He would inevitably be replaced by a less susceptible officer, which would mean leaving her, as so many others had been left. If they tried to keep their love a secret, it would not long remain a secret on this circumscribed small world of Roon. Neither he nor she, in the positions they held, would be able to endure the injury that such a secret would inflict upon their pride. On the other hand, if he was content to wait, while every day they grew nearer to each other in friendship, what a castle they would all the time be building for their love! Their intercourse would be a thousand times more frank if passion had not touched it.

From the day when he first had tea with the sisters in that old schoolroom, Deverell resolved to go back into Vivien's childhood and recapture the days before he knew her, so that, when the time came, he should be able to say without a lover's exaggeration that he had loved her since she was born. The dread that she had loved another was brief. Sitting in that dear untidy room at the tower's

top, he was so poignantly aware of the revelation he was being granted of a life which no one before him had ever been permitted to share that to speak of love here would have seemed near to sacrilege. The future, so bright and so passionate, would cast too fierce a flame upon this childish sanctuary of the past. What more could he ask than to sit here listening to the golden legend of youth? Flowers and fruit might come in their season, but let it be his to stay for awhile entranced by the bare boughs and faint green buds of earliest Spring.

There was a moment one December afternoon when the young man's resolution was shaken. He was alone with Vivien in the tower, and they had been sitting on the sofa under the casement, turning over the pages of an old scrap-book of photographs by the last opals of the wintry sunset. Each faded picture of her had been tugging at his heart. Each separate Vivien he beheld had been calling on him to tell his love to this Vivien seated so close beside him that once, when she leant over the pages, her hair touched his cheek. Smock-frocked Vivien with knave-of-diamonds hair. Long-legged Vivien with Piero della Francesca hair. Vivien paddling, swimming, riding, running, rowing. Vivien like Dryads asleep in hammocks under mulberry trees. Vivien like Oreads wind-blown on the hills of Roon. Vivien like Nereids rising from the sea. Vivien bright against the darkness of caves, and Vivien dark against the brightness of the sky. As many Vivien by field and valley and fountain, by woods and wells, as through that pattern of nursery rhymes meandered Bo-Peeps, Red Riding Hoods, Maid Marians, and Margery Daws.

The room had fallen so dusky, while they were turning over the pages of the album, that the figures in the faded photographs were no longer distinguishable.

"I say, have you any matches, Mr. Deverell? Because, if you have, do light the lamp."

"Must you call me that?" he pleaded with the ghost of her that glimmered there on the sofa against the dull cornelian of the wintry sky. "Venetia calls me Dick. Why can't you?"

"Well, we do when we talk about you," she murmured.

In his anxiety to pass for ever out of the condition of being Mr. Deverell, Dick failed to appreciate at the moment the full significance of her last admission. Later on he remembered it, and with it sustained a hundred dreams.

"Do try," he begged.

"All right. I promise to try very hard—Dick."

It was at that moment he struck the match and, as it were, in the heart of the starry flash he saw the crimson of her cheek. He dropped the lighted match, and in the greater darkness that succeeded he stood wondering if he might not dare to fling himself down beside her and tell his love. But just then the voice of Venetia singing was heard on the stairs. He hastily struck another match; when he looked at Vivien again, the fled crimson had left no more than the blush of a pale hyacinth upon her downcast face.

It was, of course, inevitable that Dick should see something of Sir Morgan, now that he was such a frequent visitor to the girls' tower. It was Venetia who suggested that he should call on him once for every four times he came to see them.

"Or else that sneak Siddle is sure to take jolly good care to let Father know you sometimes come to tea with us."

Dick did his best to be agreeable; but the Knight was not encouraging, and he made no secret of the pleasure that the departure of the garrison would give him. Only on one occasion was he at all cordial, which was when he invited Dick to dinner on Christmas Day.

"He thought of doing it himself," Venetia confided. "Which I think was rather sweet of him, don't you? He said, 'I suppose we must ask that comparatively inoffensive young man up to the House. Father Langherne will be able to talk to him about the war?'"

The Knight of Roon could no longer afford to indulge in the luxury of a permanent chaplain; but for Easter and Christmas he usually managed to secure the services of a priest, and the old gentleman who had said Mass on great festivals since the war was a trial to him on account of his apparently insatiable appetite for bellicose news. Very few of the Knight's people were Catholics, because, as he said, he preferred that his workmen should regard his religion as another personal oddity rather than that he should be expected to regard theirs as an excuse for not doing their work properly. He allowed Hamblyn to conduct a service down at the Inn every Sunday, only stipulating that he should be entitled to regard their performance with as little belief in its practical value as they were entitled to regard his. Dick himself was anxious to attend the midnight Mass, and as two of his men happened to be Catholics, he decided that it would not be considered intrusive if he accompanied them. Afterwards he wished that he had stayed away,

for the sight of the effigies and brasses of the twenty-one Knights of Roon made him feel that he in his khaki was in fact a most blatant intruder.

*Hic iacet dñs Meriadek Romare miles, qui obiit die XXI
Feb. MCCCCXCI.*

*Of yr Charitie pryce for ye Sowles of Sir Morolt Romare, Kt
of Roone, and of Dame Finguala hys Wyfe and for all Christian
Sowles.*

A.S. MDLXXIV

*Of your charity pray for the souls of Sir Morven Romare,
ninth baronet and twenty-first Knight of Roon, and of Dame
Gertrude his wife and for all Christian souls.*

Pentecost. A.D. 1873

*Of your charity pray for the soul of Donna Margherita Della
Rosa of the Princes of Candolla, the beloved wife of Sir Morgan
Romare, tenth baronet and twenty-second Knight of Roon,
and for all Christian souls.*

St. Catherine's Day. A.D. 1904

In all that long line there was only one break between father and son, when a small sixteenth-century Knight like a babe in the wood, with a ruff nearly as big as himself, was succeeded by an uncle.

Still, there must have been some daughters who married and whose bones lay less impressively than those virgins of the House of Romare, those Morgwens and Melusines and Melisendes who slept for ever on Roon. So far as he could read by the flicker of the candles there was not a single Vivien among them, and that, at any rate, was a consoling omen. Vivien Deverell? Well, really it did not sound so absurd even beside the resounding names of all those dead ladies.

Not only did Sir Morgan make himself extremely pleasant to Dick on Christmas Day, but he actually invited the garrison to attend the dance which had been held every Boxing Night on Roon since nobody knew when. Dick decided to take the risk and dispense with a regular patrol that evening, only stipulating that every half-hour a couple of men should walk down to the harbour and see that all was well. One or two guests got rather drunk, which looked

like spoiling his own pleasure, for he was expecting every minute that Sir Morgan would give orders to have them turned out.

John Holt noticed the lieutenant's worried face and sidled up to him, twinkling.

"A' look now, sir, one or two of 'em's just about beginning to enjoy themselves."

"I know, Holt. A little too much, I'm afraid. I hope Sir Morgan hasn't noticed them."

"Odds! Don't fret about that, sir. Sir Morgan likes to see 'em get a bit lively at Christmas. If we was all to go sober to our beds on this night of lawful merry-making, 'twould be no pleasure at all to Sir Morgan. My heart! when he were a young man I've seen the brandy flowing like water in this very barn. One threshing I remember we had a regular battle. It begun all right, but the brandy were such pretty stuff and went round so easy that though the men and maids started wi' threshing the barley they ended wi' threshing one another. The flails was all going like saplings in a wind. But nobody complained, and when one would fall and lie where he fell, there was none to say if 'twere the brandy or the flails that was to blame. But that's forty-three good years ago, sir, that is."

"Have you ever been tipsy, Holt?" Deverell laughed.

"No, sir, I were never what you would call properly tipsy. But I've been playful once or twice."

Sir Morgan enjoyed himself that Boxing Night, even to the extent of dancing right through Sir Roger de Coverley with Mrs. Holt as his partner. Indeed, he enjoyed himself a good deal more than the old lady, who felt that by making this exhibition of herself in public she was imperilling the good influence that she fondly supposed she had established over her husband.

"I'm bothered if my wife don't look ten years younger," the old reprobate exclaimed to the company. "She *used* to be a handsome maid. I'm bothered if I bean't in the proper mind to gi' her a rousting kiss." Whereat, to the horror of poor Mrs. Holt, who nearly wept at such a public humiliation, he pulled her under the mistletoe and gave her a kiss that cracked through the room like a carter's whip.

After Christmas Sir Morgan relapsed into his old melancholy. Indeed, he became positively morose, and poor Dick Deverell felt that he was farther away than ever from making a good impression on the Knight when he had to go up and tell him that the coastal

defence people had sent over a complaint about the visibility of one particular window in the House.

"What does that armadillo Manton mean?" Sir Morgan demanded. "How can the light of my bedroom window conceivably affect the progress of this insane war?"

"It couldn't, sir; but they've made this rule, and so I should be very grateful if you would draw your blind."

"I have already told you, Mr. Deverell, that my island is in your keeping. Pray order us all about as you desire."

Dick confided in Vivien and Venetia his fear that their father was falling back into his old hostility towards him.

"It's not particularly you," Vivien assured him. "He has always been like this since the war began. You see, he used to go away after Christmas to Monte Carlo, and he feels it frightfully. I'm afraid he'll be very disagreeable all through the Spring."

Dick called on Sir Morgan once or twice, but Siddle always told him (he fancied it was with a malignant smile) that the Knight did not feel well enough to see him. Then one day, in the front of March, he met Sir Morgan striding along the top of the island, slashing off with his sickle the yellow sprigs of gorse by the roadside.

"Oh, Mr. Deverell," the Knight said, pausing to frown at Dick, who waited miserably to hear what this cold salutation portended. "I am aware that you have to concern yourself with the lights on my island, but I cannot believe it is necessary for you, in the course of your military duties, to waste so much of your valuable time in seeing that the lights in my daughters' room are not dazzling the eyesight of Colonel Manton. I am sure you will not misunderstand me when I say that I did not bargain to provide the representative of our country's defences on Roon with all the amenities of garrison life on the mainland."

The Knight bent over, executed a hopeful bunch of young nettles, straightened himself, and strode off without another word, leaving Dick Deverell, like a lopped branch, to wither in the east wind.

For the first half of the month that searing wind rode like a Cossack over Roon. The spray broke over the harbour as it were in splinters of ice. The clustered buds of the rhododendrons in the shrubberies round the House turned to a weary brown like stale pineapples. The blackthorn buds stayed wrapped in winter's glossy purple, save where a flurry of blossom lightly powdered some lee thicket with brief snow. Even the yellow of the gorse looked rancid

in this blasting air. Dick could not bring himself to confide in the girls the reason why he was avoiding them day after day, and why he came up to the tower no longer. The weather seemed to whirl his heart across the desert of the future, whirl it like a poor husk into oblivion as mercilessly as over the forlorn beaches it drove the sand and the shells. The news from France was very bad, and his conscience began to prick him for being here on Roon when he was more than well enough to be out at the front again with his battalion. He was indeed expecting every day to be recalled, and that seemed to advance another reason why he should be more than ever careful to keep out of Vivien's way. In this state of mind it was not much consolation to be told by John Holt, whose big hooked nose was as blue as a laundress's bag, that he had never known the east wind to blow so hard and so long since he came to Roon as stable-lad to Sir Morgan's father. Several times he sat down to write a letter and explain his withdrawal; but this vile wind whipping through the bare elm-trees from the sea and rattling the loose casement of his decrepit room seemed to parch the very ink in the nib. The old adage about March coming in like a lion and going out like a lamb would be disproved this year. It had come in like a lion, indeed, but it apparently intended to go out like half a dozen sabre-toothed tigers. And then on St. Patrick's Day the wind shifted into the south. The island was drenched with a warm and welcome rain for twenty-four hours; after which, the sun blazed down from a cloudless sky, the bracken uncrumpled everywhere its downy fists, and on the cliffs the primroses began to come out quicker than stars in the clear green dusks of Spring.

All through that bitter wind Dick had devoted a great deal of attention to night-duty, partly because it kept his men from thinking that they were the only ones hardly used by the weather, partly because it gave himself an excuse for that withdrawal from the society of the girls whether for walks about the island or talks in that dear untidy room at the top of the tower. Now with this serene weather he found that the habit of roaming the island by night was too strong to be shaken off so easily, and on these balmy moonlit nights of Holy Week he rarely came home before dawn. Good Friday was flawless as Good Friday usually is. All day the island was as still as if it lay fathoms down in the azure sea. At midnight Dick visited Greenwater Cove, hoping that Wilson and Haddaway, who were on guard along the west of the island, would not have discovered what a magical place it was when such a moon as

to-night's hung over the valley behind. The winding path of daisies ran like a silver brook between the tender springing fern. The prim-roses under the darkling trees showed like glow-worms. The perfume of the first bluebells gushed forth upon the kindly air from sheltered nooks where they had grown apace. Far away out on the wide beaches beyond the towans the faint whistling of the sea-pies came delicate as the song of nightingales, or as a nocturne of flutes; and when he paused on the last spur of the valley above the cove, where the plashy ground was odorous with water-mint, he saw a pair of the birds running along the glimmering sands, perfect nocturnes themselves with their plumage of shadows and moonlight. But nowhere down that glissade of sparkling shells and nowhere across that pale sand whose gleaming edge was strewn with the white petals of the distant tide were seen the footprints of himself and Vivien. The barrenness of so much wasted beauty became too poignant. He turned away from the cove to follow the path that led along the short cliffs to the towans. Those louring north-west slopes with their backs to the moon consorted better with his humour than all that blanched and lovely emptiness he had left behind him.

Presently Dick heard the heavy boots of the patrol come tramp-ling over the young bracken in their path. Followed the glitter of a bayonet and a tremendous challenge:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Lieutenant Deverell."

"Pass Lieutenant Deverell," said Private Wilson in a tone of baffled ferocity.

"No ghosts about to-night?" he inquired.

The two sentries laughed.

"No, sir, not to-night. Grand night, sir, ain't it?"

"Beautiful. Anything to report?"

"No, sir."

"No mermaids washed up on the long beaches?"

The two sentries laughed again.

"No, sir," said Wilson. "But it's funny you saying that about mermaids, because Haddaway and me was talking about mermaids on'y a few minutes ago."

"You were?" Dick asked in some astonishment at what moonlight would do for the poetical faculty of a Wilson and a Haddaway.

"Yes, sir, Haddaway kep' company with a mermaid once."

"What?"

"In the menargery where I worked before the war," Haddaway explained. "But we broke it off on account of her tongue."

"Oh, her tail was not the trouble?" Dick laughed.

"Well, that's what I told her," Haddaway continued. "I said to her 'Yes,' I said, 'your tongue's pretty near as long as what your blooming tail is,' I said, 'and what's more, what's *more*,' I said, 'you can wag it twice as fast.' But afterwards I thought I'd bin a bit hard on the girl, because she had a very aggravating employment, sitting in a tank all the afternoon and evening between the conger-eels and the performing seal, and nothing to do on'y comb her hair and listen to people arguing the point whether her tail was made of sardine-tins or silver paper, besides getting hit on her dicollty all the time by buns as was intended for the seal. Well, such is life for them as has to earn their living," Haddaway concluded philosophically.

"Don't forget you're to be at Rosevean by half-past one to take those signals from Howitt and Price on Carrackoon."

The sentries saluted and passed on.

Dick clambered over the fence that used to guard Sir Morgan's sheep from the cliffs and strolled along under the shadow of Big Tor, debating with himself whether he should go back to bed or follow the sandy track winding across the shimmering blue waste of moonshine to Romare's Watchmen. Bed seemed idle in this mood of discouragement, and he decided on the Watchmen. But when he found himself among those huge stones and gazed at the rolling uplands of Roon of which from this aspect Carrackoon formed the ultimate peak, the apparent vastness of the view in the deceptive light filled him with a sense of such remoteness that a panic seized him. He felt much too apprehensive to be able to say by what or of what he was frightened. He merely had a violent longing to be off this haunted ground and to hear his footsteps rasping comfortably underneath him on the friendly road again. Without turning to look at the Watchmen he set off toward Bareppa, walking very fast with that nervous gait which is something between a run and a weakness of the knees. Having once yielded to the panic, he became with every pace more susceptible to its power; and when he heard the light thud of footfalls on the sandy track behind him he surrendered completely and ran for his life without shame. The cromlechs on Big Tor were black against the moon; the cromlechs on Little Tor showed white as bones; the level green beyond swam in a tremulous sheen of enchantment. "Once over the gate this panic will leave

me," he thought; and he fled fast through the gap between the Tors as if the elemental spirits of Roon were pursuing him in the shape of a bull which a mere gate would baffle. He vaulted the gate and looked back over it, panting, to defy the magic ground from which he had escaped. And then his heart, which had been beating fast, nearly stopped altogether at the apparition of a small white form flying towards him over the dew-laced level green.

"I just recognized you in time not to let out the most appalling yell," he told Venetia when in her nightgown she was perched beside him on the gate. "And so it was you that came pitter-patter behind me?"

"Dick, your conscience must be in a loathsome state," she said. "And so it ought to be. You *have* treated us in a beastly way."

"I haven't really, Venetia dear."

"Well, look here I'm not going to sit on this gate and talk, because it's hel—— I mean it's jolly uncomfortable if you've got nothing on but a nightgown. I say, I didn't quite say 'hellish,' did I? Because I went to Con to-day."

"To who?"

"To confession. It's Good Friday. Of course personally I think it's always better to go the last thing on Easter Eve. Still I didn't say it, so I'm all right for Sunday bar accidents and touch wood. Look here, come and sit over there on the bank."

"Venetia, ought you to sit down in your nightgown?" Dick demurred.

"Oh, very well if you don't want to talk to me, don't. I'll go back and finish my walk. Good night."

She jumped off the gate and started to run away across the turf.

"Venetia, I was only trying to be sensible," he called after her. "Come back! There's nothing I should love more than to talk with you anywhere."

She turned and looked at him suspiciously.

"You needn't bother about being polite, you know. We've got used to your rudeness by now."

He took her hand.

"Come and sit down. Please! And I'll try to explain. Your hand is quite warm."

"Of course it is."

"Well, may I take off my tunic for you to sit on?"

"No, I don't want anything. I like the feel of the earth against me; and besides, the sand on this bank isn't wet like the grass."

He did not argue with her any more, and they sat down among the tufted irises in the moon's eye.

"Why haven't you been near us for nearly three weeks?" she asked.

He told her what her father had said more bitingly than the east wind.

"Well, of course, Father is like that. Vivien and I knew he would probably say something to you. But that's no excuse for you, is it?"

Dick racked his mind for an explanation of his attitude that would be accepted. In the end he gave up and resolved to confide everything to the little girl beside him.

"If it had just been that we were friends, Venetia darling," he said painfully, "I would have told you and we should have laughed. But when I knew that every day I came to tea in the schoolroom I loved Vivien more wildly I felt as if I could not tell her about your father without telling her that I loved her."

"Why shouldn't you tell her that you love her?" she whispered.

"Oh, because if she doesn't love me it would be so horrible for her to know that I was always on Roan."

"And if she does love you?"

Dick trembled, and his voice was dry in his mouth.

"Even if she did love me I felt I ought not to tell her until I was free."

"I say, you aren't secretly married, are you?" Venetia gasped. "Because we don't let divorced people get married."

"No, no, no, no, Venetia! I meant free of the war."

"Phew, you made me feel hot all over in spite of only having a nightgown on."

"So that's how things stand with me," he sighed.

"Do you love Vivien frightfully?"

"I loved her from the first moment I saw her coming down the steps with those lilies in her arms, though I suppose," he granted unwillingly, "I didn't actually know I loved her till just before I chucked that stone into the sea that day at Carrackoon."

"Well, I should tell her as soon as you can, if I were you," Venetia declared positively. "Because since you gave us up she's simply pining away."

"Venetia! But not on my account?"

"Haven't you thought she was in love with you?"

"Perhaps once or twice it seemed just possible. But I loved her

so madly that I couldn't bear to take any risk and lose her for ever. Oh, Venetia, do you really think she does love me? But why should she?"

"You are an ass, Dick. Why ever shouldn't she? As a matter of fact I thought she would from the very first. I could have fallen in love with you myself if I wasn't so jolly prudent. I'm much more prudent than Vivien, though of course, nobody thinks so."

"Well, if I hadn't loved Vivien," he vowed, "I should have fallen in love with you. As it is, I do love you much more than ordinary people love ordinary people they're supposed to be in love with."

"Dick, you are a conceited fathead. Ordinary people! What makes you think that you're so jolly extraordinary?"

"I must be, or I shouldn't be friends with Vivien and you. But oh dear, what will everybody say? What will your father say, and your brother?"

"I don't see that it matters what anybody says. If I were in love, I'd let everybody go to hell before I listened to what anybody said except my beloved. Oh, bother, now I've said it, and—oh well, after all it's not swearing. It's just the truth. I *would* see everybody in hell before I gave up anybody I loved, and so would Vivien."

"Then, she's a Catholic, and I'm not," Dick added gloomily.

"Well, that's only a detail," said Venetia. "Neither Vivien nor me would ever bother about that. You see, we both believe much more in love than in *anything*."

"But have you talked about my being in love with her?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course, I haven't."

"Then how do you know she loves me?"

"I've got eyes, haven't I?"

"But did you know I was in love with her?"

"Well, of course I did. I wouldn't want eyes for that," she added scornfully.

"What a fantastically clever little thing you are!" he exclaimed. "But still you may be wrong about Vivien. Oh, Venetia, darling Venetia, suppose you *are* wrong?" he groaned.

"Well, then you'll have to wait till I'm seventeen and marry me instead. I should think the war would be finished by then."

"No, don't laugh at me, Venetia."

"Well, you ought to be laughed at, you silly owl!"

"I love her so madly, so wildly. Venetia, you're not playing a joke upon me, are you? You are serious?"

She took his hand.

"Of course, I'm not joking. I wouldn't ever joke about love. You think I'm small, but I understand such a lot about love. Dick, I really do. And you don't think I'd egg you on to tell Vivien you love her unless I thought your telling her would make her happy? Think how much I must love her. You foolish old Dick. You don't know what a darling she is."

"Venetia, I believe I do. And I adore her beyond any words I shall ever have to tell you or her."

They sat for awhile in silence, staring up at the moon.

"Everything looks so easy by this light," he said at last with a sigh. "Stones wear armour; trees sail like ships; hills touch heaven. But in the morning not all the magic of this March weather will be powerful enough to make anything look easy. And, Venetia, how shall I ever tell her? And when? And where? She's hurt with me now. She'll have lost all her confidence in my friendship."

"Come up on Sunday afternoon," Venetia suggested. "Then ask us to go to Carrackoon with you on Monday. We'll take the dinghy. And I'll manage so that you're alone with Vivien. Well, now, I think I'll go back to bed, because it really is beginning to feel a little cold. I suppose you won't be frightened to walk along the lower road by yourself? Because I'm going to take the high road."

"Venetia, I hope to goodness you haven't caught a chill."

"Well, as a secret I don't mind telling you that I've got woollen coms on underneath my nightgown. Besides, I'm going to run all the way."

He picked her up in his arms and kissed her. Her face against his was cool as flowers; and when she left him, dancing along toward the moon, he watched her until she disappeared over the brow of the hill as small and white as the tail of a rabbit, scamping along the moon-parched road.

12

THE LITTLE WOOD

When Dick Deverell came down on Sunday morning two purple Easter eggs were waiting for him on his plate.

"From the young ladies," explained Apps, whose turn it was to prepare breakfast. "And I was pertickerly arst to see as you ate them, sir. I think they're all right. I mean to say, I shook 'em well when the ginger young lady, who brought 'em was gone. And they appears to me perfectly ordinary eggs inside."

"Residence on Roon has made you very suspicious, Apps."

"Yes, sir, you do get the rattling habit, and that's a fact. It's being so careful with everything what's left on the beach as does it."

If Apps had not been there, Dick might have put the eggs in his pocket and gloated over them like a vicarious hen for the rest of the day. He did suggest tentatively that it was rather a pity to crack them; but Apps was firm.

"You needn't be afraid as the colour will hurt you, sir. My poor old mother used to colour 'em up for us nippers, and we never took no 'arm from it."

When the eggs were consumed, Apps remembered that there was another message which in his anxiety to do justice to the first he had forgotten.

"I beg pardon, sir, but the ginger young lady left word as you was *not* to go up to the House this afternoon."

"Not to go?" Dick gasped in consternation.

"No, sir. Sir Morgan expects them to keep the padre from annoying him, I was given to understand."

"Oh, all right, thank you, Apps," Dick sighed.

"But I haven't given you all the message yet, sir."

"It's taking you a very long time."

"Yes, sir, but it was a very long message; and the ginger young lady broke off half way through, because she wanted to show me how to make a omlitt. And which she did, sir, and some of the men's been eating it. I mention that fack, sir, in case the sergeant creates about your eggs being all used when I put in an indent for another dozen. I hardly liked to stand in the young lady's way, because she was set on showing me how to make this omlitt, and

which was a rare good omlitt and rolled up on the dish as sweet as a strip of linoleum."

"But what was the rest of the message?" Dick asked impatiently.

"Well, sir, it was to say that if you'd like to go over to Carrackoon with the two young ladies to-morrow afternoon would you be at the steps about two and row over with them in the dinghy."

"Did Miss Venetia say she wanted an answer?"

"No, sir, I gather she thought the answer was you'd be there. I beg pardon, sir, but it's my week on Carrackoon commencing to-morrow, sir. Me and Edwardes, that is. And I was wondering, as you was going over there in the afternoon, if you'd give leave for Edwardes and I to play in the football match and come over a bit later. I don't suppose as the Germings would get up to any of their blooming tricks on a Bank Holiday, but if they did I was thinking you'd be there to attend to them."

"What is this football match?"

"Well, sir, it's the garrison versus Roon, and if it could be managed, sir, me and Edwardes is the garrison backs."

On going into the matter with Sergeant Gusborne, Dick was informed that the match was to take place at half-past two if the men could have the necessary leave.

"We shall be playing in the field at the bottom of the Punch Bowl, as they call it, and it'll be low water then, so that nobody's likely to pop over from Penzawn—I mean to say, sir, the enemy isn't likely to try and effect a landing at the pier."

"Are you suggesting that the island is to be stripped of sentries for the football match, sergeant?"

"No, sir, there'll be two men out, which is Midgley and Smith, and neither of which cares for football. So I thought if they'd give an eye round the island the rest of the men could have a holiday till half-past four."

Dick debated with himself for a moment. It seemed all wrong that he should be looking forward to what might be the afternoon of his life and that he should be afraid of letting his men celebrate the holiday with a football match.

"Very well, sergeant, from two till four-thirty. I'll be on Carrackoon, so that Apps and Edwardes need not come across till the match is finished. Let me see, Howitt and Price are over there now."

"Yes, sir. Both very nippy forwards, sir," said the sergeant persuasively.

"You mean you want their services in the match?"

"Well, sir, the men have set their hearts on winning."

"All right. But don't fetch them over to Roon till half-past one."

The sergeant saluted and retired with unusual briskness.

"Even Gusborne has improved since he came here," Dick thought, "and the men have really been behaving very well. I suppose I've no business to let them turn to-morrow into a holiday. But . . . oh, well, one must allow common sense to be heard sometimes. That's one of the few privileges attached to temporary servitude."

Although Monday's sky was azure from the horizon to the zenith, all day a company of clouds visited the islands in ever changing shapes, now floating along the grass with the warm hues of nymphs, now hanging like discarded draperies of silver net upon the tree-tops, wandering, drifting, shifting, enclosing every valley with a snowy rampart, enfolding every hill in a celestial embrace, now turning Roon into an archipelago of green islets, now leaving Roon emerald-bright to dazzle in the sun and stealing over the water to transmute Carrackoon.

"I suppose we shan't have a real fog?" Dick said, when he took his place in the dinghy's stern as commanded by the girls.

"Oh, no, they're only little clouds," he was assured.

And looking over his shoulder he saw them gliding round the cliffs now like a cymophanous frieze of marble.

They rowed past Merg, the sister of Mab, though she was primrose-decked from top to toe, rowed on toward the south until they came to where at low tide dark Mab in rocky armour was joined to the green mother of them both by a ridge of gleaming shingle; and here in the little bay thus formed they landed.

The sea-campion was in full bloom on these southerly slopes of Carrackoon; but the cold winds of early March had kept the blue-bells back, so that only here and there under the lee of the boulders did they show like pools amid the tumbling foam of white blossom.

"I vote we go and sit in the little wood," said Venetia. "The tide won't be in for a long time yet, and the dinghy's quite safe where we pulled her."

The labour of climbing up these fragrant slopes out of the silver sea toward that impending sky of azure was exquisite, but it was definitely a labour.

"Phew! I wish I'd put on a thinner frock," Venetia puffed. "It's jolly well boiling hot. My gosh! I'm sweating like a bullock."

"You are a dirty little pig," Vivien turned round to protest.

"Darling, I can't be both. But if you think I'm more like a pig, well, then I'm sweating like a pig."

"I wish I wasn't in khaki," Dick interposed. "I'm the only one who's *really* hot."

"Fancy! We've never seen you except in khaki," said Vivien.

"Do you look nice in other clothes, Dick?" Venetia asked.

"I hope I look better than I do in khaki."

"Vivien looks an awful peach in summer clothes," said Venetia.

"Shut up, will you?" her sister expostulated. "If you're going to make personal remarks all the afternoon, I shall go back."

"Well, you began them by talking about Dick in khaki," Venetia, who had gradually fallen far behind, shouted shrilly.

Dick had been pondering the advisableness of saying that Vivien could scarcely look nicer in anything than she did in her faded blue tweeds, but he decided to hold his tongue.

To anybody rowing round the island the little wood of Carrackoon looked not much more than a bosket of gorse darkening the top of the slope to the south-east—a mere eyebrow on the great green face whose nose was the cascade of rocks this side of the Tol. Even as one drew near to it, coming along the path that encircled the flattened crown of the island, it did not suggest anything that could be dignified by the name of wood. But suddenly the path dipped sharply under a green nest of honeysuckle and one was in the wood, or rather one was still in the path, with the sea shining up like an aquamarine through a thicket of dwarf elms growing down the cliff, and on the other side a tunnelled bank thick with primroses above which stretched the level floor of the little wood. Owing to the luxuriance of the moss, the angle at which the sun's rays struck it, and the lie of the land all round, the brilliance of this green and golden carpet could not be likened to any mortal texture, not though all the crafty East from Smyrna to Pekin were ransacked for a paragon. The more notable trees, mostly sweet-chestnuts and oaks, were planted in half-a-dozen wide rows; but at either end a confusion of stunted hawthorns, beeches, pears, and sycamores were even now with their bare boughs dense enough to obscure the sky. The chestnuts and the oaks must have wrestled with the wind up here for more than a century, for, though the tallest of them was hardly twenty feet high, their trunks were massive and contorted, and their boughs met above the wide alleys of lusted moss between their rows.

"Blessed be he who planted this spot," Dick said in a low voice

to Vivien, when they had stood hushed for awhile, listening to bird-song in the thickets and to faint sea-murmurs among the rocks far below.

"I expect it was my great-great-grandfather Morolt," she said. "He loved trees. These are very very old, although they seem so small."

"But they don't seem small," Dick said. "They seem enormous, primeval. Saturn might have rested in their shade."

They walked slowly across the wood into the sunlight where in a narrow dell between the trees and the granite-strewn slope beyond hundreds of hoop-petticoat daffodils were blooming.

"Why, this is amazing," Dick exclaimed, kneeling down to look closer at the golden funnels drinking in the sun, the tallest of which did not stand six inches above the grass. "This is extraordinary! My mother was proud if she could keep half-a-dozen of these daffodils through a winter. This might be the foothills of the Pyrenees. Who could have planted them here?"

"There was an Englishman about twenty years ago who planted a good many flowers all over the island," Vivien told him. "Most of them have been eaten by the rabbits, but the little brutes won't touch daffodils."

"This *would* be a place for flowers—after the war," he said. "Has your father absolutely set his heart on getting this island back for the Romares?"

"Yes, but the Palatinate will never let him have it."

"I wonder if they would let me have it?"

"I don't see why they shouldn't," Vivien said encouragingly.

"Hulloa!" Dick cried. "What's become of Venetia?"

They looked round and called to her; but the only answer was the silence of the birds, which began to sing again when they ceased calling.

"I'd better go and see where she is," said Vivien.

"Oh, but she'll be all right. She's not likely to tackle the Tol again."

"Yes, but I think I'd better go and see where she is," Vivien repeated, walking quickly away over the daffodils toward the dark battlements of Mab, the peaks of which just showed over the rim of the land.

They reached the path above the white slopes of sea-campion, up which they had clambered; and there down below on the ridge of shingle that joined Mab to Carrackoon they saw Venetia dancing

between the sea and the sea, her only garment that red-brown hair, which she was using as an extremely abbreviated skirt.

"Stay where you are," she shrieked when she caught sight of Vivien and Dick on the top of the island. "Stay where you are! I've got nothing on! You can't come down! I'm getting cool! I'm going to bathe in a minute! And then I'll be getting warm! So you—can't—come—down!"

"Let's go back in the little wood," said Dick huskily.

Vivien turned in silence, and he saw that both her cheeks were flecked with crimson. He was on the point of protesting against the idea that Venetia's behaviour had to be blushed for, when he stopped abruptly, divining in awe that the crimson flaming there was never kindled by Venetia, but that it was the crimson sunset of her girlhood, the crimson dawn of her love.

They retraced their steps, walking over the daffodils until they turned aside to enter the little wood again.

"Vivien, you know that I love you?"

Fainter than the faintest murmur of the sea below, fainter than the faintest lisp of the faint wind in the boughs above, he heard her whispered "yes."

"Vivien, do you love me?"

And fainter still, so faint that the frail wings of an orange-tip butterfly fluttering past seemed to drown it, he saw her whispered "yes."

"Vivien, have you loved me for long?"

She could only answer with her sea-blue eyes, and in them there burned a fire that was dateless.

"Ah, kiss me!"

And as she gave him her lips the wandering clouds cast their web round the little wood, so that space beyond it was utterly annihilated; but, within, the moss was lustrous as ever at their feet, the sky was not less clear above the over-arching boughs, and the orange-tip fluttered undismayed about the latticed sunlight.

"Vivien, you're pale now."

"Am I?"

"My sweetheart, why are you pale?"

"I think it must be happiness."

"You *are* happy?"

"Oh, so happy!"

"But can it possibly be true that I have made you happy?" He was as genuinely astonished at his own prowess as if he had looked

at himself in a mirror and there been confronted by the image of a paladin.

"I should think it has always been pretty obvious," she said, smiling, and the light in her sea-blue eyes was such a light as the sun casts through the flooded arch of a sea-cave.

"It never was to me," he avowed. "Once or twice I half dared to hope that you might love me. But, my sweetheart, we haven't wasted this Winter. We were growing closer to each other all the time."

"Except the last three weeks," she reminded him.

"I was in despair," he cried.

"I think I was too."

And then for a long time they sat recalling each day and hour and minute that was marked in the calendar of their love, living through the past again with all the present could add to it. But of the future they did not speak yet.

"Well, I suppose we must soon be going back to Roon," Dick sighed at last. "It's four o'clock apparently. I can't understand it. Have you got a watch?"

She looked at the sun.

"Yes, it must be quite four o'clock. Oh, Dick, will all life go by for us as quickly?"

"Unless we are parted."

"Dick, you couldn't go back to the front now?" she cried in torment, and death's pale shadow tore the roses from her cheeks.

"You never know what will happen these days," he muttered, gripping her hand until its whiteness matched her face. "Ah, my dearest, tell me I've not been selfish in telling you that I loved you. You wouldn't have been happier if I'd gone away without telling you?"

"How can you be so foolish? But, Dick, don't talk of going away, when there's all the Spring and all the Summer to come."

"Oh, my treasure, shall I see you among those foxgloves at last? Vivien, kiss me once again before we leave this little wood."

At last with most reluctant steps they turned away, looking back from time to time as if they would see sitting on the green velvet ground beneath that chestnut tree their own wraiths still entranced; and indeed presently the cloudy shapes came drifting back among the trees, embracing them with ghostly arms and leaving kisses on their boughs that sparkled in the sun when they had passed on.

"Venetia will be glad," she said.

"I owe her everything. I owe her you," he vowed.

Venetia was lying on the beach fully dressed when they found her, and the tide was flowing in blue and silver eddies over the ridge of shingle where, it seemed at once a moment and a century ago, she had been dancing.

The little girl sprang up and looked at them.

"Ah, you darlings, you're happy now," she cried. "And oh, Vivien, do just to oblige me ask Dick to kiss you, because I want to know how you look when you're being kissed. Oh, and I say, Dick, I hope you didn't see too much of me when I was undressed. Still, after all, I shall be your sister-in-law, so it's only a detail."

When he was helping her to launch the dinghy, she leaned over and whispered:

"This was a much better plot than the other, wasn't it? Practice makes perfect even in plots."

"Well, I think they were both splendid plots," he declared with fervour. "Venetia, I might as well try to empty the sea as try to thank you." He blinked. "Is there a tear in my eye?"

"Yes, because the sun's in your eyes."

"Not the sun, but you, darling little thing, and you'll be in my eyes for ever."

As the girls dipped to their oars two ravens flew croaking overhead, and a shadow as from their wings passed over Vivien's face.

"I wish we hadn't seen them to-day," she murmured.

"Still, they're always about," Dick said.

Then, as the dinghy came round the corner of Carrackoon into view of Roon itself a dark destroyer belching black smoke from all her funnels swept churning on her way toward Penzawn.

"Did you see that?" he gasped.

"I should think we did," the girls laughed, resting on their oars while the dinghy tossed in the wake of the ship.

"Well, I'd sooner have seen ten thousand ravens than that," he declared; and when the girls saw how pale he was they laughed no more, but bent to their oars so that he and they might learn quickly what that dark shape portended.

13

APPROPRIATELY THE THIRTEENTH

In spite of Dick's forebodings all was well apparently on Roon when they drew alongside the pier. Sergeant Gusborne came down to meet him, a broad smile on his face.

"Garrison won, sir. Garrison three goals. Roon nil."

"Did the sentries report seeing a destroyer pass the island on the other side?" Dick asked.

"There was no report of anything like that when I saw them last, sir."

"When was that?"

"Well, I suppose it would be about an hour ago, sir. A bit more perhaps," the sergeant replied.

"Where are they now?"

"Midgley and Smith, you mean, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, they was walking in the direction of the towans, sir. At least, I think so. Only, I was in goal, and there was a bit of a rush down the field by the Roon forwards just at that moment, so I didn't see if they turned in by Punch Bowl cottage or not. Ah, there they are, sir," he added, with a sigh of relief as two khaki figures appeared from the direction of Rosevean.

"Shall I come up to the tower after I've taken their report?" Dick asked the girls, trying not to let his anxiety break the spell that was over him.

So it was arranged, and he left them to hear what Midgley and Smith had to say.

The two sentries, however, had nothing to say.

"You mean to tell me you were patrolling the west of the island," Dick exclaimed, "without noticing that destroyer? Where were your eyes then?"

"We never saw nothing, sir," Midgley declared. "Well, when I say nothing, of course we seed plenty of rabbits."

"Did you see the football match?" Dick asked angrily.

"Yes, sir—I mean, no, sir—— Smith and me can't play football with our hearts. Why, the doctor told me once it was as much as my life was worth to even push the kid's perambulator."

"I'm not asking if you played. I know you didn't play in the match. But how long did you spend watching it?"

"We never spent no time at all, sir. Smith'll tell you the same, sir, if you don't believe me. Of course, in the proper execution of our duties we had to pass along the road once or twice; but we didn't hang about not a minute more than we could help."

"And you walked right round the island?"

"Yes, sir." This with much injured emphasis.

"And you saw no kind of vessel anywhere near Roon?" Dick pressed.

"No, sir. Nothing more than a rabbit or two, if I die to-night. That's right, ain't it, Smith?"

The other sentry, who had exceptional adenoids, breathed a heavy confirmation of his colleague's assertions.

Dick was beginning to hope that his anxiety was unfounded, when Sergeant Gusborne came up to say that Mr. Holt wanted to speak to him for a moment in private.

The old man was hopping about under the big elm by the drive-gates, looking as agitated as a jackdaw in a wicker-cage.

"Come into my room, Holt."

"I'd rayther tell 'ee what I've got to tell 'ee along the road, sir, if you don't mind," he said mysteriously. "Perhaps if you'd walk along a bit of the way wi' me, sir, I could pop back up to my work across Long Meadow, and I shan't lose so much time."

"But it's Bank Holiday, Holt."

"I know it be, sir. And don't I hate it? I could ha' cried to see such beautiful weather wasted. I don't know whoever it was thought of these beggaring bank holidays. Sundays is bad enough, but I suppose we mustn't say nothing against Sundays. But bank holidays, bah! We do read as the Lord rested the seventh day, but darn'ee, we don't read as he took a bank holiday on top of it to play a rubbishy game o' football wi' Bellsbub. It makes I mad, sir!"

By this time they had passed beyond the barracks, and Holt after turning round to see that no curious ears were listening inquired in a portentous whisper if Dick had seen anything unusual that afternoon.

"I saw a destroyer come round Rosevean Point just now."

"What might that be, sir?"

"A small warship."

"A-look now," the old man exclaimed, screwing up his eyes. "You did, then?"

Dick nodded.

"I suppose you saw it too?"

The old man drew closer.

"I saw 'un and I spoke to 'un," he whispered hoarsely.

Dick must have gratified him by the startled expression on his face.

"Tell me about this, Holt."

"That's just what I've come down to tell 'ee, sir. But if you'd turn in by this gate, sir, we could be walking back up along and I'm a bit busy this afternoon."

They turned to the left into Long Meadow and followed the path that skirting the wooded hillside below the House continued in a diagonal up a sloping pasture toward the farm, the grey buildings of which crowned the summit like a fortress.

"Well, sir, I'll tell 'ee how it all come about. About three o'clock I went down into Greenwater to shift the bull. We do always peg him down there come April Fools, because the feed's a bit early in the valley. Ernie Pascoe were away down to the football-field, though what manner of football poor Ernie can play I'm bothered if I do know. He's a poor wambling soul, and if the ball was to catch 'un a crack on the head I'm bothered if his pinch of brains wouldn't be addled worse nor ever. Well, sir, I were walking down Greenwater valley, calling bank holidays all the names I could lay my hands to, when I heard a great snorting and stamping. 'Drat it!' I says to myself, 'if that blessed bull bean't broke loose again!' And I were thinking what I'd tell Ernie about his pegging as soon as I saw 'un, when lo and behold, I looked out to say, and there was a great black ship gallivanting and cavoorting along into the cove. It frightened I. I never felt so frightened since I saw Sir Morgan in his bath one morning. 'Come in, come in, Holt,' he shouted when I knocked at his bedroom door. And when I come in, there was he standing up as naked as an image. Oh dear, oh dear! I didn't know which way to look. You could have put I in an egg-shell. And when I saw this great ship I felt just about as small. 'I suppose 'tis the murdering Germans come at last,' I said to myself, and it come into my head to loose William the Conqueror and see if he'd keep 'em off."

"William the Conqueror?"

"The bull, sir. And then I thought I'd do better to run back along and call the garrison. But law, sir, they was all playing football on the other side of the island, so that weren't no good."

"The sentries weren't anywhere about?"

"Ah, bah! the sentries!" the old man ejaculated in contempt. "The next thing was this great ship dropped anchor wi' a rattling of chains like the Day of Judgment, and presently a boat put off for the beach."

"Oh, it did?" said Dick, his heart sinking.

"Well, by this time I weren't quite so frightened, and feeling a bit curious I stayed where I was. The next thing I saw was a young fellow in a dark blue suit coming up the beach like a high-stepping hackney. 'That don't look like a fire-eating, cut-and-come-again German,' I says to myself. More like a police inspector nor anything, he were. So I turns around and walks slowly back up Greenwater Hill. Well, I hadn't got the better of halfway up when I hears 'Hi!' being shouted behind me. 'Beggar it all,' I said to myself. 'That don't sound like haythen German. That sounds like good apple-pie English, that does.' But I didn't turn my head, and presently he shouts 'Hi!' again. 'My goodness,' I says to myself, 'supposing he puts a bullet through my back,' and wi' that thought I turned round and touched my cap.

"'Good afternoon,' says he.

"'Good afternoon, sir,' says I.

"'I suppose you know what I am?' says he. 'I'm a British naval officer.'

"So I touched my cap again. But of course I never said I'd took him at first for a police inspector. Because that would never ha' done.

"'And who are you?' says he.

"'I'm farm-bailiff to Sir Morgan Romare,' says I. 'And John Holt be my name.'

"And on that he axes me nineteen questions to the dozen about this, that, and the other on the island—such as where we growed our crops and where we got our water and how many men Sir Morgan employed and what the buildings were he could see yonder and what that shed was he could see here. And when he'd done axing questions he puts his hand in his pocket and pulls out half a crown.

"'That's for yourself,' says he.

"'Thank you, sir,' says I.

"'Isn't there a garrison on this island?' says he.

"'There is, sir,' I told him.

"'Where are they all?' he says, looking at me very straight and fierce.

"'They're playing football,' I says.

" 'Ah,' says he in what I thought was a very nasty tone of voice, which made I think to myself, 'I'm bothered, if that bean't the last question I'll answer for 'ee.' But as it happened, he didn't ax no more, but swung round on his heels and marched away back down along to the cove as high and mighty as the Dook of York. Then the boat pulled in for him, and he was rowed aboard again. After that the ship hung about in Greenwater Cove for half an hour or more, and I could see him walking up and down the deck wi' a spy-glass and spying us all out. So I thought I'd crape down and tell 'ee what had happened. It come back to I afterwards as I oughtn't never to have said nothing about the football match. But he took I a bit on the hop, and the words slipped out of my mouth, as you might say. You seem a bit worried, sir?"

"Well, I'm afraid there'll be the deuce of a row, Holt. You see, the sentries ought to have challenged him."

"A-look now, of course they ought," Holt whispered, shaking his head.

"Did you tell Sir Morgan about this landing?"

"I did, sir. He was the only one I did tell."

"And what did he say?"

The old man paused, before he went on in a deprecating voice.

"Well, sir, Sir Morgan were a bit glad about it."

"Oh, he was?"

"Yes, sir. He said, 'And a good job too, Holt, if they did land and find out their damned garrison's as much use on Roon as——' Well, what he said after that, sir, was a little too downright for me to repeat. And now, sir, by your leave I'll be getting back to my work. Good day, sir."

The old man, touching his cap with a quick jerk, trotted off up the hill.

It was no good locking all the stable-doors now, Dick thought, and he turned aside to walk up through the wood into the drive, his heart heavy with anxiety over the outcome of this unlucky business. When he reached the top of the drive, Venetia's voice called to him over one of the granite bastions of the lofty garden wall.

"Dick! Don't go round by the front of the House, Vivien's in the Knight's Walk. She'll tell you why."

Dick's spirits sank lower, as he turned to the left along a grassy terrace under the walls, and entered the Knight's Walk, a wide overarching avenue of pines that ran the whole length of the ilex-shadowed garden protecting it against the blustering south. The

trees had been planted by the same Romare who planted the little wood on Carrackoon. Otherwise the name would have been inappropriate, for it was one of the few places on the island where Sir Morgan himself never set foot, owing it was said to his once having peppered his father's gamekeeper there when he was a boy. It seemed absurd that the memory of a childish mortification should have endured all these years, but John Holt vouched for the truth of the tale. Consequently for anybody on Roon to make an assignation in the Knight's Walk was equivalent to saying that he wished to keep out of Sir Morgan's way.

Vivien had just reached the far end of the Walk when Dick came round the corner at the other, and not even his present anxiety could quite destroy the elation that made his heart leap when he thus beheld her coming towards him out of the blazing gold of the westering sun that burnished the pine-needles in her path to the semblance of splintered bronze and turned the tree-trunks to pillars of copper. He had so often and so ardently conjured her image to fill some lovely void like this.

"Vivien!"

"Dick, the worst has happened," she cried.

"I know, the wretched bad luck of it," he groaned.

"You know? But has Father spoken to you already?"

"No, it was Holt who told me."

"Dick, what are you talking about?"

"That confounded naval fellow who landed in Greenwater Cove this afternoon. It's bound to mean a fearful row. It may mean—oh, Vivien, it may mean my going away from here."

"We're talking about different calamities, my dear." She put her arm in his, and they paced the Knight's Walk, talking of a future as dark and distorted and lengthy as the shadows of themselves upon the spangled ground.

"When Venetia and I got back, Father came up to our room in one of his rages. He said he'd seen us going off with you to Carrackoon in the dinghy, and apparently he looked through the telescope and saw you and me walking arm in arm across the top of the island. Venetia said he ought to be ashamed of himself, and he struck her with his cane."

"Vivien, he didn't? How infernal!"

"Oh, he didn't really hurt her," Vivien went on. "But Venetia picked up a flint arrow-head and said she'd hit him back if he dared hit her again. 'You damned girls are utterly out of hand,' he

said. 'But I'll have no more of this philandering on Roon. I forbid you to go fooling all over the island with this soldier fellow. If he comes near this tower again, I'll have the whole place screwed up and keep you directly under my eye in future.' So you see, Dick, it's hopeless to think of talking about an engagement to Father in his present mood. The war and money difficulties and anxiety over Murdo have upset him too much."

"He won't be upset by the garrison much longer," said Dick gloomily. "Or at any rate he won't be worried by its commanding officer."

He told her what had happened this afternoon.

"Your father must have just left you when Holt told him. No wonder he was so delighted!"

"But, Dick, do you really think that this will mean your going away?" she asked tremulously.

"I'm afraid so."

"Back to the front?"

"I expect so."

"Soon?"

He turned and caught her to his heart.

14

BUT THE THIRTEENTH OF APRIL

It was not till noon on the thirteenth of the month that an M.L. came over to summon Dick to Penzawn, just when he was beginning to hope that nothing was going to happen after all.

From

Lieut. Col. J. S. Manton

O.C. Lyonnese Coastal Defences

To

Lieut. R. V. Deverell

O.C. Roon Island.

13/4/18.

With reference to recent visit of H.M.S. Centipede to Roon on Monday the 1st inst., you will proceed immediately to Penzawn

and report to me the facts. You will bring with you John Holt, alias Hutt, alias Hott, the farm-bailiff, for inquiry to be made into his conduct. If necessary you will bring this man over under arrest.

"Take I over to Penzawn!" Holt exclaimed when he was informed of Colonel Manton's orders. "But, odd rat it, Duchess may calve at any moment, and both the middle-white sows is likely to farrow this very morning. I'm bothered if I'll go trapesing over to Penzawn when there's such a mush of work to do on the farm."

"War's war, Holt," said Dick, shaking his head.

"I do know that, sir. But beant cows cows and pigs pigs just as much? Law! Of course they is! Bah! How would it be, sir, if you wrote and said I were too busy to come?"

"It's no use, Holt. Orders have to be obeyed in these times."

"No times at all I don't call them," the old man grumbled. "Pooh, bah! pooh, bah! it makes I feel mad. I've got nobody here I can lave to do anything. Ernie Pascoe's no blessed good at all if anything should go wrong wi' poor Duchess."

However, the old man had to go, and once he had made up his mind to the inevitable he cheered up and greatly diverted the skipper of the M.L. on the way over.

"Hullo," he said, when Holt came on board. "Is this the desperate criminal your old man was telling me about?"

"Oh, I be a criminal now, be I?" Holt chuckled. "Ho-ho-ho! Ho-ho-ho! Well, my wife have called I a good many names, but she never called me a criminal yet."

Dick asked the skipper if he had heard anything about the strafe.

"Oh lord, yes, there's been the deuce to pay," he was told.

"Apparently some bright lad at the Admiralty wanted to say he'd won the war. So, he got into touch with Admiral D at Portham who dispatched *Centipede* from the flotilla to wake us all up. Even my old man at Porthmear wasn't warned about it, and he's raising hell now for sending a t.b.d. into his waters without proper notification. He and Colonel Manton have become quite friends over it. But I should think the Colonel would get it in the neck. Apparently the skipper of the t.b.d. landed without a shot being fired wherever he thought he would, the whole way round Lyonesse. Oh, there's some strafe going on. But it was a low game. Dash it, you don't expect Fritz to be a gentleman, but you do expect your own people to play the game."

Dick began to feel hopeful that in the general dismay caused by the unwarrantable activity of Portham and the Admiralty he might be lucky enough to retain his command; but Colonel Manton was much too sore over the prospect of losing the C.M.G. that he had been nursing along for over three years to spare his subordinates.

"This is a very grave matter for you, Deverell," he said, when Dick presented himself at his headquarters. "It means a court-martial, I'm afraid, unless you have some satisfactory explanation to give me."

"Well, sir, I should like to hear the charge against me first," Dick said.

"Listen to this that I've just received from the G.O.C. West-South-West District. Listen to this, Mr. Deverell."

The Colonel seized a paper from his desk and began to read:

"The D.A.Q.M.G. Redford understands that the biscuits . . ."

He threw the paper down, and shovelled aside the accumulation of soiled snow upon his desk.

"Jenkins!" he bellowed at last.

The military clerk appeared.

"Jenkins, did you take that letter from the G.O.C. West-South-West District?"

"No, sir. It's on your desk. Here it is, sir."

"Ah, yes, here we are. All right, Jenkins. Let me see now. *Furthermore the cliffs at a point from Pendhu Cove to the village of Nancepean were found entirely unprotected . . .* no, that's not it. Where the deuce are my glasses? Jenkins!"

The clerk reappeared.

"Did you take my glasses away just now?"

"No, sir."

"You must have done. They aren't on my desk anywhere."

Jenkins extricated them from a pile of papers, and retired once more.

"Now then, where are we? Ah, yes. Here we are. Listen to this, Deverell:

Furthermore Lieut. Commander Catterall reports that at 3.15 p.m. on the same date he anchored in Greenwater Cove on the west side of Roan Island. He was rowed ashore and landed without seeing any sign of a sentry. He was able to walk up to the top of the island without being challenged by anybody. Here he found an old

man who said that he was farm-bailiff to Sir Morgan Romare—the owner of the island. This person whose name is John Holt, Hutt, or possibly Hott gave information freely to Lieut. Commander Catterall in return for the sum of two shillings and sixpence. On being asked if there was a garrison on Roon Island, this person replied that the garrison was playing football. Lieut. Commander Catterall then walked back to the beach without being challenged and reports that after waiting another twenty minutes in Greenwater Cove without seeing any sign of a sentry on the west side of Roon Island he left shortly after four o'clock and proceeded round the west coast of Lyonesse. Lieut. Commander Catterall reports that when Centipede was rounding the southerly point of Roon Island he observed coming from the direction of Carrackoon Island a small boat rowed by two women in which a military officer was seated in the stern.

"That's a pleasant report to receive from the G.O.C., Deverell! And now perhaps you'll explain the reason for this disgraceful neglect of your duty."

"With regard to the football match, sir," said Dick. "I exercised my discretion and gave permission for this to be held. I considered that two sentries would be sufficient for a couple of hours."

"But good lord, haven't you learnt that the country is engaged in a desperate struggle with a powerful enemy? Is this a time for football matches?"

"Possibly if there were some golf-links on Roon, sir," said Dick bitterly, "you might not be so shocked at the idea of occasional recreation."

"Recreation? Damn it, it's a recreation to be on a place like Roon in these times. What about the poor devils at the front?"

"I've already been to the front, sir," said Dick coldly. "I may point out, sir, that this was a holiday, and that it seemed to me quite reasonable . . ."

"Reasonable! Reasonable!" the Colonel choked. "Don't let me hear that damned word again. It's not your business to reason. We don't reason in the army. We obey."

"Very good, sir, if you dislike the existence of reason—it seemed to me justifiable to do anything I could to promote good-feeling between the garrison and Sir Morgan Romare's workpeople. I am at a loss to explain how it was that the two sentries on duty failed to observe the approach of the *Centipede*. Both men positively

deny that they did see her, and I have no reason—I beg your pardon, sir—no cause to believe that they are lying. With regard to the officer seen in the small boat . . .”

“Ah,” the Colonel interposed. “Yes, perhaps you’ll explain that unfortunate business?”

“That officer was myself, sir.”

“Ah, indeed?”

“Having given leave to the two men stationed on Carrackoon to play in the match, I went over to Carrackoon myself for the afternoon.”

“With two women according to the captain of the *Centipede*.”

“With Miss Vivien Romare and Miss Venetia Romare, the daughters of Sir Morgan Romare,” said Dick, frowning a challenge, which the Colonel declined with a grunt.

“Umph! And what about this fellow Holt? As far as I can make out he’s nothing better than a paid spy.”

Dick laughed outright at this.

“Did you laugh then?” the colonel demanded angrily.

“I beg your pardon, sir, but the picture of old John Holt as a spy was rather unexpected. I think, sir, it would be as well if you spoke to him yourself.”

“I intend to. I have the strongest suspicions of him. As for you, Deverell, I can only say that I am disgusted by the levity of your conduct in a responsible position. I shall send in a strong report on your behaviour. It may or may not mean a court-martial! But I shall make it perfectly clear that I have no further use for your services under my command. It’s sad to find a young man like you so wanting in conscientiousness. As soon as I hear from the War Office that you are recalled I shall send over another officer to take over from you. I shall probably accompany him myself, and inspect your trenches, etc.”

“My trenches, sir?” Dick repeated in astonishment. “What trenches?”

“The trenches that your men have presumably been digging all this winter.”

“I had no orders to dig any trenches on Roon. You will find no mention of trenches, sir, in any of your communications to me. Had you instructed me to dig trenches, I should have asked you to indicate where they were to be dug.”

“This is getting worse and worse,” the Colonel babbled. “Jenkins! Jenkins!”

The clerk arrived hurriedly from the next room.

"Look up the copies of instructions issued to Lieutenant Deverell and find out what orders were given about trenches on Roon."

There was a long correspondence on the subject of lights. There were questions and answers about a variety of topics, from latrines to gas-masks. But not even with the help of Jenkins could Colonel Manton discover a word about trenches.

"I must have given you verbal instructions," he said at last.

"No, sir," Dick insisted firmly. "You have never mentioned trenches to me on any of the four occasions I have seen you. And if any inquiry into my conduct is held, sir, I shall make a point that no trenches were mentioned in any of my reports to you, and also that you have never visited Roon to inspect such trenches. Nor, I may add, have I received any orders with regard to the disposition of my sentries."

Colonel Manton spluttered for a moment or two and then—the Saxon blue of that C.M.G. turning to a melancholy grey, its scarlet to rust—he decided to change the conversation by demanding the production of Sir Morgan Romare's farm-bailiff.

The old man, who had been entertaining a couple of orderlies, arrived in fine fettle.

"Are you Holt?" Colonel Manton demanded.

"That's right, sir. I be John Holt," he replied, dabbing at his forehead with crooked forefinger.

"Not Hutt?"

"No, sir."

"And not Hott?"

"No, sir, not these days," said the old man, twinkling. "But I were once upon a time, sir."

Colonel Manton frowned.

"I don't advise you to make jokes here, my man. Your position is a very serious one . . ."

"Oh, is it? Oh, well, I see I must be a bit careful then," said Holt solemnly.

"Jenkins, make a note that this man's name is Holt. H-O-L-T. I suppose that is how you spell it, eh?"

"That's right, sir."

"Now, Holt," said the Colonel fiercely. "Explain what you mean by taking half-a-crown from an unknown officer who landed on Roon last Monday."

"Ah, but I didn't take it, sir. He gi' it I."

"But you accepted it, didn't you?"

"Of course I did. Wouldn't you have done the same, then?" the old man asked cunningly.

"Insolence isn't going to help your case," said the Colonel.

"Oh, then I see I must mind my p's and q's wi' you, sir. Why, you take anybody up quicker nor I took up that half-crown."

Colonel Manton glared.

"Did this officer ask you any questions? Be careful now."

"He did, sir."

"And did you answer them? Be very careful."

"I did, sir."

"Ah, you did? Do you realize that I could have you shot for answering those questions?" Colonel Manton asked, leaning forward over his desk as if with out-thrust penholder he would himself transfix the culprit there and then.

"You could, sir? Oh dear, oh dear!" But the idea of being shot by the orders of Colonel Manton was too much for the old man's gravity. He began first to chuckle to himself and then to laugh outright, and finally to slap his knees in a very ecstasy of loud and uncontrollable mirth.

"What the devil are you laughing at?" Colonel Manton shouted.

The old man gasped and spluttered, but managed to pull himself together at last and say:

"Why, sir, I were laughing at the comical notion of you having I shot."

Whereupon he was seized again with convulsions of merriment.

"This man's a raging idiot," the Colonel exclaimed to Dick. "I thought you said he was Sir Morgan Romare's farm-bailiff?"

"So I be, sir," Holt put in, "and the sooner I get back to my farm the better I'll be plased, because I'm expecting one of the cows to drop her calf this afternoon, and she's a bit of a tricky old marsel this Duchess, as we do call her. Perhaps you'd be kind enough to explain to this gentleman," he added to Dick, "that I'm wanted back on Roon as quick as possible?"

"No doubt, you *are* very anxious to get back, Holt," said Colonel Manton. "But in these days you can't sell information to the enemy and not expect that it won't be found out."

"Information to the enemy?" the old man repeated. "Who's the enemy, then?"

"How did you know that this officer who landed on Roon was not a German?" the Colonel asked in triumph.

"Because he weren't," Holt replied immediately. "That's how I knowed."

"That's not an answer to my question. *How* did you know? Come, come, no shilly-shallying!" the Colonel pressed.

"Well, sir, he called 'Hi!' in good English as ever I heard."

"'Hi' might be any language."

"Yes, sir, but he trod in a cow-pat just after, and the Lords and the Commons and all the Royal Family put together couldn't ha' spoke better English than he spoke about that cow-pat. And I'd have said the same myself, sir, and so would you."

Colonel Manton gave it up.

"Well, I'm inclined to take a lenient view of the matter, as this is your first offence," he announced grandly.

"Thank 'ee, sir," said Holt, jerking his fingers up to his forehead.

"But you won't get off so lightly the next time."

"Oh, I won't? Ah, well, I must be a bit more careful, I see."

"Yes, you must. A great deal more careful," said the Colonel.

"The next time that a strange officer . . ."

"But, begging your pardon, sir, this chap weren't strange. We're all a bit strange these days of battle, murder, and sudden death, but he weren't at all out of the ordinary strange."

"Don't interrupt me," said the Colonel angrily.

"I won't, sir."

"The next time that an officer you don't know lands on Roon, your duty is to keep your mouth shut."

"I will, sir. Tight as wax."

"And if ever I hear of your taking any more half-crowns, Holt, you'll find that it's a serious matter—a very serious matter indeed."

"I hope the half-crown's a good 'un, sir," said Holt. "I wouldn't like to get into trouble wi' the police on top of the military."

Colonel Manton made a final attempt to impress him.

"You're an old man, Holt."

"Seventy-four, sir."

"And you have missed the glorious privilege of serving your country on the field of battle . . ."

"Yes, sir, thank God!"

"Orderly!" the Colonel shouted, and when the orderly appeared: "Remove this man," he commanded, taking out his handkerchief and mopping his face.

Fortunately for Dick's temper, the Colonel was too much

exhausted by Holt to bully him any longer, and ten minutes later he and the old man were on their way back to Roon.

"I've been thinking about Colonel Manton, sir," he said to Dick on the quay when they landed. "And I'm bothered if ever in all my life I ever met such a stupid fellow before. I'm bothered if it won't make even my poor wife smile a bit when she hears he wanted to have I shot."

As they were walking along past the barracks, Ernie Pascoe, with bandy-legged gait, came tottering excitably across Long Meadow.

"Mr. Holt! Mr. Holt!" he cried. "The big middle-white sow have farrowed beautiful while you was to Penzawn. Twelve on 'em. And all so clane as pinks."

"A-look now, Ernie. That's good, that is." Then he turned to Dick with a chuckle. "I'm bothered if Ernie bean't twice the man the Colonel be. Bravo, Ernie, you done well."

"Yes, Mr. Holt," said Ernie, grinning and flushing with pride at such praise. "I stood by her all the while, and once or twice she looked up in my eyes so martel loving, I could ha' cried."

I 5

BLOOD CAVE

A week later Captain Walter Bickerstaff, mercifully unaccompanied by Colonel Manton, arrived to take over the command of the Roon garrison. He brought with him, too, an order for Dick to present himself before a medical board that it might be ascertained if he was once more fit to be killed in France or Flanders or any other place where victims sound in wind and limb were required at the moment. At the same time, as a salve to the toes of the O.C. Lyonesse Defences and the S.N.O. Porthmear so rudely trodden upon by Admiral D of the D flotilla, Portham, Colonel Manton's breast knew the Tyrian of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire and Captain Hodson-Snell, R.N. became a bosom Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George. No doubt the ache in Colonel Manton's toes was not quite cured by so stingy a dose of soothing syrup; but after all, he could still dream of that C.M.G. coming to lighten the dark days of peace;

and though he was more jealous than ever of Captain Hodson-Snell, he had to admit to himself that it was only Captain Hodson-Snell's righteous and loudly expressed wrath which had saved an awkward situation. Incidentally, in case Admiral D should be annoyed by the decoration of the Lyonnaise defenders, he was give the Bath, while the fertile genius brooding over a desk in the Admiralty received not only one of the next consignment of Legion of Honours, but the Montegrin Order of Danilo, an odd one of which had survived at the back of an Admiralty drawer the absorption of the Principality in the Kingdom of Serbia. Thus what might have been a most unpleasant business was handled with such tact as to leave everybody more anxious than ever to get on with the war.

Captain Bickerstaff was an elderly schoolmaster, who having devoted some of his leisure many years ago to the cadet-corps of a second-class public school, considered himself quite an old soldier. Unfortunately—or it might be more accurate to say fortunately—for Captain Bickerstaff what he remembered about the training of squeaky-voiced juvenile volunteers was not of great service in the training of the New Armies. Added to his incompetence in that direction he had what amounted to a lust for asking his commanding officer awkward questions, and on failing to receive the correct answer an unquenchable determination to instruct his commanding officer what *was* the correct answer. The result was that colonels all over the belligerent globe had one after another seized the first opportunity to push Captain Bickerstaff on to somebody else. When any of them had been asked if he could spare an officer for a job, he had never hesitated to choose Captain Bickerstaff as the ideal officer for that job whether it was a censor that was wanted in Egypt or a sanitary expert that was required for a waterlogged camp in North Wales. Once or twice it had been difficult to get rid of the incubus without offering him promotion at the same time, and, should the war last long enough, there was no reason to suppose that Captain Bickerstaff might not ultimately achieve the rank that would become his grey hairs. After being handed round the world like a bad florin since December 1914, he had been handed some three months ago to Colonel Manton as the very man he wanted to superintend the installation of the pigeon-cotes, for which he had been clamouring two years. The only people who got any pleasure or profit out of those pigeons were the natives of Lyonnaise; and when the last bird was eaten Captain Bickerstaff himself, with his blue and white brassard, came and roosted on Colonel Manton's

doorstep, where he made himself such a nuisance that, after trying unsuccessfully to hand him back to his last owner, the Colonel finally decided to put him in charge of Roon.

"I'd better erect a cote there, hadn't I?" Captain Bickerstaff had suggested.

"Certainly not," Colonel Manton had replied, with visions of posers attached to carrier-pigeons arriving day and night. "I don't believe in these confounded birds. You'll have plenty to do, pulling things together on Roon, without bothering about pigeons."

"I wonder how long it would take to get an answer back from the mainland. How long do you think, Colonel?"

"I don't know how long it would take, and I don't care."

"Well, now, let's work it out, Colonel. Have you a piece of paper? Here we are. Here's Roon. Five miles. If a pigeon flies at a hundred and thirty miles an hour, how long will it take to fly five miles?"

"I don't know."

"Five into a hundred and thirty, isn't it? You'll find it quite easy to work out if you get yourself a pencil and paper. Five into a hundred and thirty. Twenty-six, isn't it? That's the twenty-sixth of an hour. Twenty-six over sixty equals thirteen over thirty. Call it roughly two minutes. Look here, let me show you, Colonel. It's a perfectly simple little sum really. Very well, two minutes from Roon to Penzawn. Then we might allow you twenty minutes to read my message and get the answer up to the Penzawn cote. That's twenty-two minutes. Add . . ."

"I will not have pigeons on Roon, Bickerstaff," the Colonel roared. "You'll have plenty to do digging trenches."

Captain Bickerstaff's dull eyes had brightened as he tugged thoughtfully at his drooping grey moustache.

"We might dig out a few antiquities," he had suggested, nodding slowly.

Colonel Manton had darted a suspicious glance to see if this insufferable pedagogue were laughing at him, but he had let the insinuation pass, for he had been too anxious to get rid of Bickerstaff to accuse him of anything that might prolong the interview.

It was not to be expected that Dick could be favourably impressed by his supplanter; but even he had not been prepared to dislike anybody quite so much as he disliked Captain Bickerstaff from the moment he saw him coming slowly up the steps of the pier equipped almost as variously as the White Knight.

"You're well armed," he observed, looking at the two pistols in holsters, a large jack-knife swinging at the hip, and the loaded whip the newcomer was carrying.

"Always have three of them," Bickerstaff said in a melancholy drone that seemed to preserve the echoing sighs of a hundred bored class-rooms; "I never like to be taken unprepared. I've got another in my hip-pocket which I always keep under my pillow. Ever try one of these patent stoves? You see, you put the oil in here. Then you set this pointer to the degree of air-pressure you want and pull out this handle, and after . . ."

Dick yawned.

"I haven't a mechanical mind, I'm afraid," he said curtly.

When he had established the supplanter in his own decrepit little room—he had arranged with Sam Hockin to sleep at the Inn for his last night—he braced himself for the odious task of showing him round the island.

"Were you out at all on any of the fronts?" Bickerstaff inquired, eyeing Dick's ribbon of the Military Cross as if it were not a genuine exhibit.

"In France, yes."

"That's about the only part of the war I haven't seen anything of," said Bickerstaff. "I've knocked around a good deal otherwise. On the whole I've enjoyed myself very much these last three years. But I like this place," he went on, looking round him with a patronizing appreciation. "I hope they'll let me stay here for the rest of the war. But of course my trouble has been that so many people want my services. Let me see. Roon? Now what would that be derived from? There's a Rona up in the Hebrides. Roon—Rona. Yes, probably Seal Island. And Carrackoon, what would that be? Probably the same as Carrick and Crag. The Rocky Island, I should say. Are you interested in the etymology of place-names?"

"Sometimes," said Dick as discouragingly as he could. "This part of the island is called Rosevean."

He explained about the tides and the need for embarkation and disembarkation at the steps when the harbour was dry.

"Yes, well, of course, I shall find out all those things for myself. Those steps look very badly kept. I shall put a man on to cleaning them down. Rosevean? Well of course that's easy. The little heath. There must have been a heath somewhere about here once."

"We shall cross it farther round the cliffs."

So, the dreary walk proceeded. It seemed to Dick that his successor's path was marked all the way round the island by a slimy trail like a slug's.

"What's this fellow Romare like?" Bickerstaff inquired when he had just been pointed out the house.

"I don't think I should advise you to give him any lessons in etymology, Bickerstaff," said Dick. "You won't find him a very good listener."

"Very few people are good listeners nowadays," said the other sententiously. "That's one of the faults of the age. You'd be astonished at the widespread ignorance with which the war has brought me into contact. And the curious thing is that people don't seem to want to learn nowadays."

"Don't they really?" Dick exclaimed sarcastically.

They passed along the road leading over the top of the island to the towans.

"Now, that's where I shall have a line of trenches," said Bickerstaff, pointing to the gap between Big Tor and Little Tor.

"I don't think you will," Dick contradicted. "That happens to be where most of the cromlechs are."

"So I perceive," said the other calmly. "That's one of the reasons why I chose this particular line."

"What do you mean?"

"As you've probably gathered, I happen to be rather interested in megalithic remains, and no doubt Romare will be glad to take advantage of my experience. Trenches have got to be dug somewhere, and it happens that this is an excellent strategic position."

"Do you mean to say you're proposing to dig into the cromlechs?" asked Dick hotly.

"I do, my dear sir."

"But you can't commit a piece of vandalism like that," Dick protested.

"Careful examination is not vandalism, my dear sir."

"Well, I warn you that Sir Morgan Romare will never allow you to dig up those cromlechs."

Bickerstaff smiled wearily.

"We shall see, my dear sir."

Dick was nearly blind with rage, as he led the way over the sandy track towards the beaches, so nearly blind that he did not perceive Private Wilkins until he was within a couple of yards of him.

"This is one of my men, I suppose?" Bickerstaff was saying.

"Did you imagine he was a beefeater?" Dick asked rudely.

"Good morning, my man," said the new commandant. "And what are you supposed to be doing at the moment?"

"I'm on guard, sir."

Bickerstaff turned to Dick and inquired what his name was.

"Wilkins, eh? Well, Wilkins, suppose you were to go up that large hillock . . ." He was pointing to Little Tor.

"I did go up there once, sir," Wilkins snapped in cheerfully.

"Yes, never mind what you did once, Wilkins. I want you to listen to my question. Suppose you were to go up that large hillock, and on arriving at the top suppose you were to discover it in the occupation of half a dozen of the enemy, what would you do?"

"What would I do, sir?"

"Yes, my man, what would you do?"

"Why, I'd probably stop one with my behind as I was running down again, sir. Or more."

The new commandant clicked his tongue in disapproval of this reply.

"Have you got a box of matches, Deverell?" he asked. "I can explain the position more clearly to Wilkins with the help of a few matches."

"Yes, but we all know how to make a Maltese cross with five matches, Bickerstaff. And I want to get back to lunch. That's all right, Wilkins; Captain Bickerstaff doesn't want to ask you any more questions."

He may have been mistaken, but it seemed to him that, as he turned to walk on, Wilkins supplemented his salute with a slow wink.

"Ah, these are interesting," said Bickerstaff when they stood among Romare's Watchmen. "Very interesting. I've never seen a better set of standing stones."

"Perhaps you'd like to dig *them* up?" Dick inquired bitterly.

Bickerstaff shook his head.

"No, I don't think it would be worth while. I should doubt very much if there was a tomb here. Of course, in some of the earlier Norse . . ."

"Really, Bickerstaff," Dick interrupted, "if you don't mind, I'd rather not listen to a lecture on monoliths this morning."

The newcomer shook his head.

"It's discouraging to find this total lack of interest among the young men of the day. To me, you know, it's extraordinary that you should have spent so many months on this island without trying to learn something about it. I found the same thing at Garford where I've been teaching ever since I left the University. No sort or kind of interest among my pupils. I tried to start a Field Club, but I had to give it up because I found it was only used as an excuse for clandestine smoking. It's the same everywhere. I tried to get Manton interested in some remarkable Moustierian remains I discovered on the moors, and at the end of it he asked me why I didn't put down poison, if traps were no good. He thought I was talking about mice. It's really lamentable. However," he brightened, "I shall enjoy myself here."

Dick glared at him, but his complacency was imperturbable, his sensibility asbestos.

About six o'clock when Dick, exhausted by the process of handing over the command to his successor, was packing his kit, Venetia arrived at the barracks.

"Dick, Vivien thinks it won't be safe to come and say good-bye to you to-night. Father is being quite impossible, and she's afraid of his finding out."

"But shan't I have a chance of saying good-bye to her?" he stammered miserably.

"Yes, listen. You'll have to leave Roon by half-past six if you're going to make certain of catching the nine o'clock train at Penzawn. So Vivien says she'll get up soon after four o'clock and meet you where I'm going to show you, because she wants you to know the place, which is the most tremendous secret anywhere on earth."

"Suppose we meet your father now?" he asked.

"Ah, but we won't, because Vivien's with him, and it's Vivien who he's fussing about, not me. Come on."

She led the way past the drive gates, past the Inn, and on toward the big abandoned quarry, where man's disfigurement had long been turned to beauty and to grace by the amplitudinous green fans of vivid ivy that spread themselves against the walls of weathered granite, by sea-pinks and waxen navelwort growing from every crevice and by bluebells astir along each grassy edge.

"At the bottom of the quarry?" Dick asked, thinking of the lady-ferns that down in that sheltered hollow would even now be

lush beside the scattered boulders and sherry-brown pools, thinking of Vivien and himself isolated from the world in that warm windless calm.

"Huh! that's not so jolly secret," said Venetia scornfully.

So they passed on along the wide path cut round the Rosevean cliffs until they had nearly reached the southerly point of the island. Here by the fenced-in shaft of an old mine the little girl paused.

"Down here," she told him.

"Down there?" he exclaimed, peering over into the darkness.

"But, my dear child, there is no way down."

"Ha-ha, that's the secret," she cried, clapping her hands.

"For heaven's sake be careful, Venetia," he begged, supposing that she was about to show him some breakneck method of descending that black chimney.

"This is the shaft of the old silver-mine which my grandfather sunk. Only he didn't find any silver."

"No, it doesn't look very silvery," he agreed.

"Cheer up, Dick, we're not going down that way. Come down the cliffs after me, and I'll show you something frightfully exciting."

She was half way down to the sea, waiting for him by the edge of a bramble brake before he had descended twenty yards.

"My gosh! You are slow, Dick!" she jeered when he had slithered down the grass to stand beside her.

"I can't hope to rival the red deer on her own mountains," he laughed.

"Now can you guess where we are going?"

"No farther down this cliff, I hope?"

"In here."

She pointed to a low gap in the brambles, into which she crawled on hands and knees, bidding him follow her. After a yard or two this path began to cut its way into the face of the cliff, so that they could walk upright between sheer banks and see the sky above them through an overarching thicket of rusty sprays. Presently they came to a tunnel in the hillside, and, following Venetia through its dank gloom, Dick found himself on a shelf of rock about four feet wide that ran round the shaft into which he had peered and the top of which now framed the sky a hundred feet above their heads. The colour of the rocky side was a cadaverous green, and the numerous fissures oozing and trickling with moisture were tressed with small ferns like maidenhair.

"Here's the ladder down," said Venetia, stepping over the side into the clammy darkness where the shaft continued beneath them. "Mind your boots on my fingers. Don't come down too fast."

"I certainly won't," he promised in a hollow voice, the hollow-ness of which was not entirely due to the acoustics of this forbidding spot. He began to count the rungs on the ladder, but he had given up long before his feet touched the spongy clay of the bottom.

"Now, we'll shed some light on the scene," said Venetia. "Because we've still got a good way to go."

"Not farther down?" he gasped in the stale heat.

"Cheer up, Dick. It's only an adit from now on. No more ladders. I say, it's a jolly good thing you're not Orpheus."

"Why?"

"Well, he'd never have got Eurydice out, if he'd been such a funk."

"But he didn't get her out," Dick objected. "It was she who messed it up by looking back."

"Oh well, it's only a detail," Venetia declared loftily. "Phew! this beastly candle-end has gone all cock-eyed with the hotness of me. It shows you oughtn't to put candle-ends in your stocking."

However, she managed to light the attenuated stump and, bidding her companion walk as near the side as possible on account of the water in the middle, she led the way into another tunnel not more than six feet high and six feet broad, but often less, which with twists wound in a gradual slope toward the end or entrance quite seventy yards from the bottom of the shaft. This adit finished at the head of a spacious sea-cave, the sandy floor of which on a lower level was reached by scrambling down over a rocky ledge. Even now full daylight was not obtainable immediately, for the whole of the centre of the cave was occupied by a large pool, the sides of which were encrusted with red and rosy nullipores, whose calcareous deposits had left even the bare rock whence they had died off smoothly coated with the appearance of a lustrous mauve and lilac-pink enamel. The water was so pellucid that evidently it was refreshed by every high tide, and in one corner of it there was a bunch of dove-grey sea-anemones, each as large as a cactus-dahlia. The sides and roof of the cave were even more fantastic than this pool, being of every shade of murrey and sorrel and verd-antique and bloomed over a large space with a down that had the richness of plum-coloured velvet, but dripping apparently from

every crack with blood, so that the shelving rocks above the pool were spattered with it.

"This is what we call Blood Cave," Venetia proclaimed. "You'll have to take off your boots and puttees to cross the water," she warned him.

But Dick thought that he could manage to claw his way round the pool, a proceeding for which Venetia disclaimed all responsibility should he slip. Meanwhile, she herself had quickly stripped off her stockings, and, with many gasps for the coldness of the water, was wading through, her faded mauve frock adding a final note to the pool's delicate harmony.

Dick succeeded in circumventing the water, and finally emerged on a narrow stretch of sand, the colour of honeysuckle, that between two buttresses of granite ran down to the scattered boulders of the beach.

"I've got the cockle round the corner in the next cove," Venetia said, "so we shan't have to go back the way we came. Let's sit here a minute or two while I dry my legs. And this is where you're to meet Vivien to-morrow morning. You must row round in the cockle, but she'll come down through the old silver-mine."

"By herself?"

"Of course she will. Why, she and I and Murdo have climbed going to keep *cavé* on the cliffs up above."

"You think Vivien will be all right climbing down that shaft?" he asked anxiously.

"Of course, she will. Why, she and I and Murdo have climbed up and down hundreds of times. We're the only people on the island who know about it. Except Holt. Father doesn't, which is a consolation for the afflicted. Holt told Murdo about it once, and he told Vivien, and they agreed never to tell anybody else. And then I was told; and Vivien and I took it on ourselves to tell you, because we didn't think Murdo would mind frightfully. You see, if you go away, there may be a little difficulty with Father when you come back again, and I thought of this place for secret meetings. You could hide on Carrackoon and row over from there to see Lord Ullin's Daughter, but not for an hour before and after high tide, because then the pool makes you too wet, and there's nowhere to sit outside, and the fondest lovers might get a bit depressed by sitting on the wet clay inside the adit."

Venetia's babble about the future cheered his spirits, and he hugged her to him with one arm.

"Dearest of dearest little girls!"

Then the thought of what he was going away to lose, perhaps for ever, swept over him in a sickening wave.

"Venetia, it's jolly nearly unbearable," he muttered brokenly.

"What's the man like who's come to take your place?" she asked just to choke back the tears, not because she cared.

"Oh, he's a most loathsome fellow," Dick averred.

And then, not because he wanted to talk about him, but because he could not think of any other topic that would let him merge his grief in another emotion, he expatiated for ten minutes on the abominableness of Bickerstaff.

"He sounds like a tutor we once had for an experiment," Venetia said. "But the old ram butted him head over heels one day, and then we unpegged a rather fierce bull we used to have, and then he went away."

They tried to talk about schoolmasters and tutors and governesses for awhile; but presently they fell into a tristful silence, both scrabbling foolish pictures on the sand beside them.

"Well, if I don't put on my shoes and stockings," Venetia said at last, "I'll wet my legs all over again with tears."

Each of them made an effort to laugh at this poor little joke.

"I think I ought to go back to the House now," she said when the laughter had dried up feebly.

"Yes, I expect you ought."

She flung her arms round his neck.

"Good-bye, my darling Dick, and you know I know you'll come back? I'm sure you'll come back. I'm positive and certain you'll come back," she avowed.

They rowed back in the cockle to the steps, and pulled the small craft above the tidemark.

"To-morrow morning you'll be waiting for Vivien about four o'clock?"

"But I'll see you again, won't I?"

"Oh yes, I'll come down and wave you away from the pier."

She fled from him abruptly and turned aside to fight her way up through the blackthorn thickets that grew round the edge of the big quarry. That little form must have craved some desperate exertion with which to overwhelm her sorrow.

Dick did not sleep that night, and while the sky of dawn glimmered olivine, with Venus rising sulphur-pale above the thin crescent of the old moon, he dressed himself.

The dewy air was intolerably sweet when he walked along toward the steps through flutters of dark wings and a scurry of rabbits. As he pushed off in the cockle, a thrush sang very loudly and clear from the cliffs, and the call of a cuckoo floating across the dim lavender of the sea from the north of the island was answered by another call from the top of Carrackoon. They were the first cuckoos he had heard, and now to hear them thus calling to each other of Roon and Carrackoon, and of May coming soon! He pulled in closer to the cliffs because he saw among the thick veil of bluebells what might have been a crimson campion, and yet what looked like a foxglove already in bloom. Several times yesterday he had marked the flush of rose on their green buds, so early were they here. But the tallest ones on the other side of the island would wait awhile yet. He should be thinking of them in France . . . ah, Vivien!

The sky had lightened apace, and when Dick reached the cave the high moon was no more than a melting wisp of cloud. He dragged the cockle up the beach and launched it in the pool, so that he might ferry his love across. Then he scrambled up through the adit to wait in the clammy darkness until he heard her step upon the ladder high above.

"Vivien, is that you?"

Her voice up there in the darkness might have been the echo of his own, as she called down to reassure him.

When at the bottom of that shaft he held her in his arms, the squelching clay beneath their feet, the slimy walls, the stale air of this place horribly reminded him that within a few days he would be standing in the trenches without this passionate heart beating against his own, and he clasped her to him more fiercely.

"But after all," he said, carrying on his thought into speech, "nobody else in this kind of air will have a memory like this to hearten them."

"What are you thinking, Dick?"

"I was thinking that this place seemed like the trenches."

Now it was she who clung to him, so that he despised himself for harrowing her.

"Have you a candle? I never brought one."

She gave him a stump, and he must walk backward, holding the light for her to tread more easily, but chiefly because with so little time to watch her he could not bear to turn his face for a single instant from her eyes.

"How long can you stay?" he asked when they were sitting on the sand, staring out across the turquoise sea toward the little wood on Carrackoon, though they could not see the trees from here.

"Till the sun rises," she said. "Not longer, Dick."

"Scarcely half-an-hour," she sighed.

Why, even now the cursed sun was shining warm on Germany; within ten minutes it would be gilding the battlefields of France; and soon, so relentlessly, so damnably soon, it would come blazing up behind the moors of Lyonesse.

The minutes gathering brightness from without, gloom from within, fled past.

What did they amount to? A kiss, a stumbling sentence to beg her to tell him that she was happier in his love and in his absence than had he stayed and held his tongue, a hurried discussion about letters and how often he was to write to her, another kiss, another. Ah, look, already the swallows high up were glittering in the sun against that pastel sky.

"Vivien! Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my dearest."

"I had such a lot to say, and I've said nothing."

"There isn't anything to say till you come back again. Oh, Dick, I must go. I don't want to cry yet, and I shall if I don't go."

"I'll come with you to the top of the shaft at any rate."

"No, no, my darling. No, I'd rather go alone."

She broke from his arms and plunged through the pool toward the dark adit.

He stood alone in the dreadful stillness of the golden morning, and that afternoon, a century hence, he was at Paddington.

While Dick was waiting with his kit outside the departure platform whither he had gone on the chance of hailing a stray taxi, he caught sight of a figure that was vaguely familiar passing away from the booking-office. Staring more closely, he recognized Vivien's brother.

"Hullo, Romare!" he shouted after him.

The guardee turned and looked at Dick in surprise, evidently not knowing who he was.

"You don't recognize me," Dick said. "I met you at Nantivet Road last October. I've just left your . . ." he only just managed to say "island" instead of "sister."

"I'm awfully glad to meet you," said the young ensign cordially. "I've heard a lot about you from my sisters. Are you up on leave?"

"No, I'm going back to the front. There's another man in command at Roon now."

"I say, I'm awfully sorry. I'm going down to Roon now myself. I've got a bit of leave. Look here, I'm afraid I must get along; my train's just due. I shan't get beyond Plymouth to-night anyway. Still that's something. So long."

"So long. Oh, and—Romare, you might . . ." but a sudden shyness fell upon Dick . . . "you might have good weather. So long."

16

COMING HOME ON LEAVE

It is improbable that a poet who has not written, at any rate, a modicum of really great verse by the prime of his twenty-fifth year will ever begin to write great verse later on in life. It is almost equally impossible that any man who by the same period has not fallen truly in love will ever fall truly in love later. On the other hand, a woman's grand passion is liable to wait until she is over thirty; hence those tragedies of unequal love that bestrew the ways of life like dead leaves. Sometimes, however, the grace of true love is granted to a man and a woman simultaneously. Such true love is the flower of youth and rarely, very rarely, the fruit of age.

Dick Deverell and Vivien Romare loved each other, not by any process of cerebration, not by any encouragement of propinquity, not through any sentimental predisposition, but from the first moment perfectly. They loved as saints believe, as Mozart composed, as Shelley wrote.

"I knew, if you ever fell in love, you would love terribly much," said Venetia to that pale sister walking back beside her over Rosevean toward the House. "And I shall love terribly just like you when I fall in love. I know I shall."

Vivien sank to her knees on the bright grass and hugged Venetia close.

"Venetia, my precious little one," she cried, "I hope you *will* love as I love, because it's worth it, though you mightn't think so to look at me now. But even if Dick were killed I should still be happier than if I had never met him."

"I know you would, darling. And I also know that he won't be killed. I'm not just saying that to cheer you up because if I thought he was going to be killed I'd say nothing. But I'm absolutely positive and certain. Now, I don't feel a bit as certain about Murdo. I'm always expecting we'll get a telegram to say that he has been killed."

"Oh, Venetia, don't talk any more like that about Murdo, because the awful thing is that I was more glad when you said that about Dick than I was sorry when you said that about Murdo. And yet, I love Murdo much more and I love you much more and I really love Father more since I loved Dick. I love the island more. I love the whole world more!" She cried these words passionately, standing up straight in the yellow sunlight of this young April day, this young day drenched in wine-gold dew, this young day rippling like a canary sapphire and topaz-sparkled, this still day enambered.

Venetia had never heard this tranquil sister of hers moved to such a pitch of emotional utterance. She stared at her in awed amazement, her own small heart galloping in time to a wildly heroic resolve even to die if necessary for the security of Vivien's happiness.

There was no more said between them for the rest of the way home; and, when Vivien was left alone to watch from the casement of the tower the *Mermaid* sail away into the sun, Venetia, who had planned to cross over with Dick as a surprise for him, was so much overcome by the misery in his face that she lost all courage and fled off by herself to hide in the pinewood for the rest of the morning. Vivien stayed by the casement until nine o'clock, at which time Dick's train left for Penzawn. Then, feeling that it would be impossible at any rate this morning to endure her father's comments on his departure, she decided to avoid the breakfast-table. She told Susan, the housemaid, that she had a headache, which was true enough, and that she was going to sit quietly by herself in Greenwater Cove.

Sir Morgan came down to breakfast in what for him these days might have been called a good temper. The elimination of young Deverell from Roon following upon his disgrace over the unexpected

arrival of the *Centipede* on Easter Monday afforded the Knight much satisfaction. Even if he had not been worried over what he considered the undignified behaviour of his elder daughter, he would have welcomed no less cordially the removal of the garrison's commanding officer. Doubtless, the garrison itself would be removed presently. Even a fossilized ass like Manton must have realized by now that their occupation of Roon was a scandalous waste of men. He would make it clear to Vivien and Venetia that there must not be any repetition with this new fellow who had arrived of that lamentable familiarity. It would be as well at the start to forbid either of them even to speak to him. It was mortifying to be compelled to admit that a girl like Vivien was capable of making a fool of herself over the first young upstart she met; but he would be more wary in future. Nine forty-five? Why on earth were they both so late this morning? The Knight frowned. Surely they could never have had the impudence to accompany that fellow to Penzawn after what he had said to them the other day?

"Siddle, where are Miss Vivien and Miss Venetia?" he asked angrily.

"I don't know, Sir Morgan," the butler replied. "I saw Miss Venetia going down the hill toward the harbour very early, Sir Morgan. But I've not seen either of the young ladies since."

"They didn't go over to Penzawn in the *Mermaid*?"

"I'm sure I couldn't tell you, Sir Morgan."

"Go and find out at once."

"Very good, Sir Morgan."

A minute or two later Siddle came back, an angry housemaid buzzing at his heels like a disturbed wasp.

"I don't care what Sir Morgan do say, you've no business to come creeping up to the young ladies' room," she was expostulating; "if 'tis your place to do so, 'tis my place to come to the dining-room and tell Sir Morgan wi' my own lips, since you won't listen to me and give a message fitty, that Miss Vivien has a bad headache this morning and have gone for a walk by herself to Greenwater. And where Miss Venetia's to, I don't know. But she's never gone to Penzawn because I see her wi' my own eyes running along the top of the island when the boat was half way across. I surely beg your pardon, Sir Morgan, but if Mr. Siddle don't choose to speak what he's told I must speak it myself, dusty-pan or not."

On this she retired.

The Knight thoroughly enjoyed his butler's discomfiture, and he only laughed when Siddle ventured to suggest that Susan's lack of civilization was a menace to a civilized house.

"Nonsense! She's a good honest girl, and if you can't remember what you're told, it's your own fault, Siddle."

"Very good, Sir Morgan," the butler replied, with a countenance that expressed his willingness to suffer ever the injustice of flat contradiction should his master desire it.

Half an hour later Boy Alec Harvey arrived up the hill with the post, and in the first letter he opened Sir Morgan read that his son was likely to be home almost as soon as the letter. In his pleasure the Knight forgot all about the misdemeanour of his daughters. If he wanted them now, it was only to tell them the great news.

"My gad, Siddle, Mr. Murdoch's likely to be home at any minute! Where's that young rascal of a Harvey? Go and give him half a crown from me. Where's Hamblyn? Send down and tell him to come up to the House. The *Mermaid* must go back at once. Get your tradesman's orders ready for the boat, and tell Mrs. Hawkins not to be all day getting hers. Didn't you say we were out of gin? Don't get muddled over your cellar. The champagne's low, isn't it? Don't forget to order some more. Where's Holt? Go and fetch him in. And send out immediately to find Miss Vivien and Miss Venetia."

"Yes, Sir Morgan. In a moment, Sir Morgan."

"And, Siddle," the Knight called after him, "get my hat, and do for heaven's sake stir yourself! I can't think why you're always so infernally slow nowadays. Are you getting old, or what is it? My hat, I tell you."

The Knight, without waiting for his butler to bring it, hurried off to the kitchen, waving his son's letter triumphantly.

"Ah, Mrs. Hawkins," he shouted to the cook, "Mr. Murdoch's coming home. He may be here at any minute. Susan! Polly! Loveday! Where the devil is everybody?"

"Your hat, Sir Morgan," said Siddle nervously from the kitchen door.

"Damn it, what on earth are you fussing about with my hat for? I want Hamblyn fetched at once. You seem to have lost your wits this morning."

The Knight left the kitchen and went out by the back door of the House, where the first person he met was Ernie Pascoe wambling

along across the yard with a couple of buckets of pig-wash on a yoke.

"My gosh," said Ernie down at the Inn that night, describing the encounter, "th' old Knight hurried me turble savage this morning, my dears. Crash! Bang! Rumble! Bumble! he comes lumping down on my shoulders wi' his gert fists and I kneeled down under it the same as when the Scripture moveth us in several places to acknowledge and bewail. 'Oh, whatever have I been and done to vex 'ee, Sir Morgan?' I hollered, and my knees was clapping on the cobbles like th' old black mare's hoofs. 'Maister Murdo do be coming home, Ernie,' th' old Knight says to I. 'The Lard be praised for that,' says I to th' old Knight. And 'Hip-pip-pip-purrah!' I shouted, waving my arm. And beggar it, if I didn't upset one bucket of wash all over the yard. But th' old Knight were so martel pleased, I don't believe he'd a-minded if I'd emptied t'other over hisself. And wi' that he goes off shouting 'Holt! Holt!' and I thinks to myself I thinks, 'please the Lard, he'll find Mr. Holt afore Mr. Holt finds the pig-wash!' But, my dears, I never saw th' old Knight grin so wide and open since I come on Roon. And what teeth he have got for sure. Beggar it, I never see such a handsome jawful of teeth not in a two-year-old dog. White as peeled nuts they was."

Sir Morgan found his bailiff the other side of the farmyard.

"Holt, the boy's coming back!"

"A-look now, Sir Morgan, he is? Well, that's pretty news, that is."

"To-day or to-morrow. Any minute he may be here."

The old man wiped the back of his hand across his bright blue eyes.

"I *never* reckoned I'd see him again, Sir Morgan! I reckoned I'd surely ha' driven in my own coach for the first time and the last afore ever he come back to us."

"Confound it, Holt, I will not have you jabber on about dying like this. You know such old woman's talk always makes me angry. You'll outlive the whole lot of us, and well you know it, you aged reprobate!"

The aged reprobate began to chuckle.

"Ho-ho-ho! how 'ee dare say such bold words, I don't know. Still, I'm not feeling too powerful frail, and if on'y the farm were doing a bit better I'd live a bra' bit longer yet."

"Well, you don't want to worry about the farm when the boy's

coming home. Give all the men a holiday to-day and to-morrow. And where's Sam Hockin? They're to have all the beer they can drink at my expense and a double round of rum every night while the boy's here."

"A-look now, Sir Morgan, don't talk so foolish. We've got to get on wi' our work. I'm shorthanded now."

"Don't argue with me, you old curmudgeon!"

"Ho-ho-ho! Whatever might that be? That sounds something a bit bad, that does. Oh dear, oh dear!" the old man chuckled.

Then he turned grave. "A-look now, Sir Morgan," he remonstrated, "leave the men have their drinks. On'y don't leave 'em go on holiday. You do know so well as me that things is bad wi' us. Haven't you told me so yourself when I've axed 'ee if you could spare this or that for a new waggon or reaper or suchlike?"

"Well, well, Holt," said the Knight impatiently, "but as soon as the war's over I shall have plenty of money again. Dash it, I've been fixed for ready money before now."

"I know you have."

"Don't you remember when I told you to take the two best horses we had up to London and sell 'em at Aldridge's."

"I do, Sir Morgan. And don't you remember how when I come out of the auction wi' the money and give it over to 'ee outside, the sheriff's officer clapped hands on 'ee straight away? Ah, and don't I remember going home to see my poor old father in Wessex and coming back to Roon wi' a setting of pheasants' eggs half-hatched and which I carried round my middle to keep 'em warm and every man as touched I I'd spring away as if I were covered wi' biles? But we was younger then, Sir Morgan. That's the better of forty-two good years ago, that is. And that's where 'tis. I beant half the man I was. Dash it, if I was on'y a bit younger I wouldn't fret so over the work on the farm. Why, I could do more than three men's work once. So leave the men have their beer and their rum, but for goodness' sake, Sir Morgan, don't talk no more about giving them these beggaring holidays."

"That's enough of it, you old croaker," said the Knight. "And now go down to Greenwater for me and fetch up Miss Vivien, and if you see Miss Venetia send her along too. They haven't heard the good news yet."

While Sir Morgan went off to give Hamblyn his instructions about taking the *Mermaid* back to Penzawn and waiting in the harbour until Murdo arrived, John Holt went off to find Vivien.

She was sitting forlorn upon the shelving beach between the green land and the green sea.

"I've a parcel of pretty tidings for 'ee, miss," the old man said. "Mr. Murdo may be home at any minute, and Sir Morgan have sent me down to tell 'ee he'd like to tell you himself."

But the parting with Dick was still so near that even such news could not transport her.

Holt gazed at her in dismay.

"Why, whatever is awry with 'ee?" Then suddenly the truth dawned upon the old man's ever alert sense of the fact. "A-look now, miss, 'tis of another's going you be thinking," he whispered. "But just as one went and have come back, so surely t'other who have gone will come back to 'ee again. And if I was you I wouldn't leave Sir Morgan see there's a fly in the honey. There's no such a thing on earth would make him so mad agin t'other as to think you would keep one speckle on your heart for any except the one."

"But, Holt, you must know that I'm wildly happy to think that Murdo is coming home, even though it may be only for a few days?" Vivien protested.

"My heart! of course I do know it well enough, but I do know just as well that if the news had come a week ago you'd have been lepping around like an April lamb, and 'tis no manner of use for 'ee to pretend you wouldn't. 'Tis agin all that's natural to take it so quiet. What's huring 'ee inside, my dear maid, won't hurt none the less if you do show you're hurt. And remember this, there's one coming who'll listen to all you have to say about t'other. For there's none of we can hark to 'ee talk of him like Master Murdo will. And there's this I'll say afore I'm done wi' my prachifying. T'other would be the last man to wish 'ee to look melancholly, for he were as fine upstanding a young chap as ever I saw, an' kept his soldier fellows better to their job than many a good shepherd can keep his dog. 'That's a rale proper young chap,' I've said to myself more nor once. 'And if so be he's for she and she's for he, why I do wish the pair of 'em may set so pretty and comfortable as two linnets on a sprig of laylock for the rest of their martel life.' "

"And suppose he's killed, Holt? He'll be fighting in a day or two," she whispered, shuddering.

"Ah, bah! ah, bah! he won't be killed. Odd rat it! They can't kill everybody. Back along you was fretting because they was going to kill Master Murdo; and bean't he coming safe home to us maybe this very minute?"

Sir Morgan had not been able to wait for Holt to bring his daughter back, but here he was striding along half way down Greenwater Valley already, and instead of the sickle, so much in evidence lately, flourishing Murdo's letter.

Vivien ran to meet him.

"Father, isn't it splendid!" she cried, flinging her arms round him.

"But where's Venetia?" the Knight exclaimed. "She hasn't heard yet. Hulloo, and there's Fred Carlow," he went on, pointing to the stooping figure of his deaf old trapper who was apparently searching for something by the edge of the trees. "I must go over and tell him."

"Would you care for me to find Miss Venetia for 'ee, Sir Morgan?" Holt inquired cunningly. "Because I'd be likely enough to find her."

"Yes, that's right, Holt. Do hurry up and drag the child out of her hiding-place wherever she is. Carlow! Carlow!" he shouted.

But the Knight had to thump the old trapper on the back before he turned round and growled:

"Ah, would you? Get back!" Then, perceiving who it was, he made a trumpet of his gnarled hands and shouted to his master. "I thought it were the bull coming up behind me, Sir Morgan. Beg your pardon, Sir Morgan!" One of old Carlow's many queer fancies was that everybody else in the world was a little bit deafer than himself.

"Carlow! My boy's coming back," the Knight yelled.

The old trapper looked blank and then going very close to the Knight he stood on tiptoe and bellowed in his ear:

"I never know'd it were you on my back, Sir Morgan! I thought it were the bull!"

"Master Murdo's coming home! I've just had a letter, Carlow!"

"Oh, that's good news, that is," the old trapper shouted back. "Perhaps he'll tell they pesky sojers to leave my snares bide where I puts 'un to! I've missed a half-a-dozen since last night!"

"Never mind about snares to-day, and never mind about rabbits!"

"Mr. Holt said to carry on wi' the snaring till May month, the rabbits being so pesky thick this year, and all the wire scat abroad, there's no holding the varmins!"

"I don't care what Holt said! Get along down will you to the Inn and drink my health! There's beer for every man so long as Master Murdo's at home!"

The old man shook his head doubtfully at the idea of abandoning the search for his missing snares; but he knew that it was idle to argue with the Knight, whether he were in a good or a bad humour, and, turning round, he plodded away up the slope.

Sir Morgan spent the rest of the day sweeping the sea with his telescope for a sign of the *Mermaid's* return.

"I hope to heaven that old muddler Hamblyn hasn't messed things up over in Penzawn!" he ejaculated for the twentieth time.

"But, Father, how could he?" said Vivien. "Murdo won't expect to be met at the station unless we knew the time he was coming, and he's bound to go straight down to the harbour."

"Yes, but you never know what folly those waggie-tongued mandarins in uniform may be up to! Manton's probably found a submarine in his bath by now and closed the harbour to prevent it escaping. I wish to goodness I'd crossed over myself. It's time somebody put those wireworms over there in their place."

"It's a jolly good thing you didn't cross over," Venetia interposed, "or you'd probably have had your head cut off for high treason."

"Now, there!" the Knight exclaimed. "Surely that's the *Mermaid* coming out of the harbour now?"

Both his daughters without the help of the glass assured him that it certainly was not.

"You girls don't know what you're talking about," he asseverated. "Of course it's the *Mermaid*."

"Father, it isn't. It really isn't."

"Damn it, I can't see if Murdo's on board from up here." They were standing on the roof of the tower. "I'm going down to the harbour. If that isn't the *Mermaid*, I don't know my own boat, that's all. Of course it's the *Mermaid*. What'll you girls bet?"

"I'll bet you my pocket money till Michaelmas against the chestnut pony I ought to have had last birthday," Venetia offered quickly.

"Done! Done!" cried the Knight, pulling up the trap-door in the roof and nearly sliding all the way down the ladder in his excitement.

Vivien was about to follow him when Venetia pulled her back.

"What's the good of going all the way down to the harbour, if it isn't the *Mermaid*?" she asked.

"Yes, but he's so happy, the poor old darling," said Vivien. "I feel rather bad about him, and what we've said. I never never thought he minded so much about Murdo's going away."

"Well, if he forks out that pony I'll forgive him for hitting me the other day," said Venetia. "But I won't if he doesn't."

"I don't know that I approve of your having the pony," Vivien said.

"Oh, Vivien, why not? You are a beast!"

"Well, he can't afford to buy even ponies just now. So what's the use?"

"My dear, if he's so poor that one pony will ruin him, I may just as well have the pony and ride it up to the workhouse door."

It was a pity that Vivien did not accompany her father down the hill, for he happened in the expansive mood he was in to meet Captain Bickerstaff for the first time.

This horse-faced man with the drooping grey moustache cut such a ridiculous figure in those eyes that were filled with the image of a handsome young son that the Knight was most cordial to him, chuckling to himself at the notion that he had been intending to forbid any intercourse between the new commander of the garrison and his daughters. He stopped in the drive to tell him that his son was coming home. He would not have passed a scarecrow that day.

"Well, Mr. . . ."

"Captain Bickerstaff," said the new commanding officer hastily with an impressive accent on the rank. Like so many dons and schoolmasters who had discarded the gown for the gun, the pen for the sword, he was essentially bloody-minded, and he attached a good deal more importance to his captaincy than to his M.A. Nothing had galled him so much as what had seemed the quasi-civilian status of a lieutenant who was continually being addressed as 'Mister,' and he never heard himself called Captain without a schoolboy thrill.

"Oh, you're a captain, are you?" said the Knight sardonically. "The other fellow was only a lieutenant. But I suppose since the invasion of Roon by the Royal Navy the authorities felt it was quite an important outpost of the Empire, eh? Well, Captain Bickerstaff, I hope you like the look of what used to be my island."

"Yes, I fancy I shall enjoy being stationed here. By the way, Sir Morgan, it has been considered advisable to add to the defences some entrenchments, and I must give you formal notice of my

intention to dig a line of trenches across the north side of the island."

"Do what you like, my good fellow. But of course if you dig up my corn, I shall put in for compensation."

"I don't propose to interfere with the arable land," said Bickerstaff. "The arable land here does not occupy a strategic position. Should I in the course of my work come across any antiquities I shall naturally hand them over to you *in statu quo*."

"Very good of you," said the Knight, smiling.

"I understand that you already have a little museum of interesting relics found at various times on Roan. I should be much interested to look over your collection some time. One of my hobbies is archæology, and I may be able to supplement your own knowledge of the subject."

"Come up some time and I'll show you round. But I shall be rather busy for a few days, because my boy is coming home on leave."

"So I understand from one or two of your employees. In the Guards, is he not?"

Sir Morgan nodded.

"My military duties have never brought me into contact with any of the Guards' battalions, though I believe it was mooted at one time whether I should not be appointed as an interpreter to one of them during the earlier days of the war. So, I shall be interested to meet your son, Sir Morgan. I shall be able to tell him about various theatres of war of which he has probably never heard. For instance, I was for two weeks occupied in erecting . . ."

"I'm afraid I'm too busy at the moment," the Knight interrupted hastily. "I have to go down to the harbour."

"I'll walk down with you, Sir Morgan; I shall enjoy the exercise. I've been indoors for a couple of hours working out exactly how much jam the men eat. My predecessor was a little lax over some things. Though I don't think he was entirely to blame over the *Centipede*. Yes, I shall enjoy a turn with you, Sir Morgan. And I've finished my investigation into the jam. I was going to tell you about a little experience of mine in . . ."

The Knight, who knew as well as his daughters that the craft he had seen was not the *Mermaid*, decided to forgo the excitement of pretending any longer that it was. He turned round abruptly and strode back up the hill, so fast that Captain Bickerstaff, who suffered from corns, could not overtake him.

In spite of the beer and the double round of rum and the number of times that Sir Morgan rang his bell all through the night to ask if he had not heard voices down the hill and surely that must be the *Mermaid* arriving, young Murdo did not get back to Roon. But the next morning about eleven o'clock the *Mermaid*, authentically herself this time, came out of Penzawn Harbour, at her peak the or and vert pennant of Romare flying to say that the heir of the house was coming home.

17

DESECRATION

For Vivien the strange thing about her brother's return was the complete unreality of that great event compared with the way she had always imagined it in day-dreams. There he was again in that tumbledown old suit stained with sea-weed and smelling faintly of lobster-pots; but he seemed to have grown out of it, or as if his whole being had been so utterly suffused by khaki that even in these old clothes he somehow remained in khaki. Yet khaki was Dick's wear. She ought not to think of it distastefully like this.

"Murdo has grown much older since he went away," she confided to Venetia.

"Well, I expect when you keep thinking all the time you never will grow old it makes you do as much growing as you can," the little sister replied wisely. "Have you told him about Dick yet?"

Vivien shook her head.

"No, I was going to when he told me about meeting him at Paddington. But there was something in the way he spoke about him that shut me up. Something—well, not quite snobbish, but as if Dick belonged to a world which it was quite amusing for somebody in the Guards to meet."

"How assish! What did he say?"

"It wasn't what he said exactly," Vivien replied. "He was quite pleasant about him. But—oh, I don't know—I felt all the while that in his heart he looked down on Dick because he was in an ordinary kind of regiment."

"Ah, but I expect you were frightfully on the look out for his being critical, Vivien. I expect you were a bit touchy really. Besides, Father probably gave Murdo quite a wrong idea of Dick."

"Yes, but he's no business to take his ideas from Father or anybody else," said Vivien hotly. "He's not at Sandhurst now."

"But, darling, aren't you being a little unfair? Just now you were grubbling because he had grown up. Now you want him to be at Sandhurst again."

"No, I don't. But I want him to be himself and not think being in the Guards signifies anything. Who were the fathers of these young men he's such friends with? Pill-makers, half of them! Pooh, I hate these beastly parvenus who put their sons in the Guards to try and turn both of them into gentlemen."

"Now it's you who's being snobbish," Venetia pointed out.

"Well, I wouldn't be if parvenus weren't such snobs themselves. But I think it's disgusting to hear Murdo talking about Dick as if he were a nobody and in the next breath enthusing about some loathsome young man with one of the great historical names of what—of advertising. I think it's just damnable nonsense to pretend that it means anything to be in the Guards nowadays, when you know it's simply a question of money."

"Still they *are* fighting and getting killed just like everybody else. And you haven't told Murdo yet that you and Dick are secretly engaged. If you told him and then he put on airs you could tell him what you thought of such assishness. Look here, shall I tell him for you?"

"No, indeed not. If he were tactful about it, that *would* be more than I could bear," Vivien declared.

"Do you know what I think?" Venetia suggested. "I think when you've had a letter from Dick you won't feel nearly so critical about Murdo."

Perhaps Venetia was right. Anyway, the letter arrived, one of those crackling letters that more than any others seem to express with their outward appearance and the texture of their paper the ardours of the love they enshrine. And in this very letter there was one passage which made Vivien regret her hasty judgment of Murdo and long to give him all her confidence:

I expect your brother has told you that we met for a brief moment at Paddington. One doesn't want to stake too much on a mere coincidence, but it really was rather astonishing that I should meet

him on the way to Roon and then again on my way back to the front. When I was driving off in the taxi to my dismal hotel through that dark sad London of the war you can't imagine what courage that meeting gave me. I built out of it a whole great shining castle of consolation. Your brother isn't in the least like you except in the tone of his voice and the way he turns his head. It brought back to me old times, when you and I, my heart, were as shy with each other as no doubt he and I were the other night at Paddington. But he was extraordinarily pleasant to me. He hadn't a notion who I was till I told him, and then his smile—a little like Venetia's, his smile—was as if he had known me for years. I wished I could have had a really long talk with him. I couldn't help wondering if he had guessed anything about you and me. He did say that he'd heard a lot about me from his sisters, and I had a kind of idea, so charming was his smile, that he had guessed something. I was glad to think of him going back to the island for a little time, and I've been hoping hard that the weather is keeping as glorious for him as it was during my last days. People are more optimistic out here than I thought they would be, considering the March business. More optimistic in fact than any time since 1915. What a winter I've escaped! Everybody seems determined not to go through another one like that. I wonder if you'll tell your brother about you and me. I rather hope you will. You never know when we might meet again, and I think I'd like him to know. But of course you're the judge of that. But I have set my heart on having him on our side when the moment comes to talk about the future practically.

Vivien had taken her letter to read on one of the islets off the west of Roon, a green hummock of sea-pinks and early lambtoes and springy tufts of maritime grasses, which was reached at low tide by a narrow isthmus of sand. Nobody could possibly disturb her without coming down the cliffs, and nobody could come down the cliffs without setting every single dog off barking—those six patient dogs that eyed her reproachfully from the beach where they sat in a dejected bunch, wondering why on this fine morning their escort should choose to bring their walk to an abrupt end by sequestering herself on a wretched hummock of grass and leaving them to waste their time like this on a rabbitless beach. But Vivien paid no attention to their mute protests. She had donned those sheets of crackling note-paper like magic wings and she was away

with her love, hearing neither the buzz of the wild-bee about the clumps of yellow lambtoes on which she sat nor the fountains of lark-song rising and falling over Roon, and certainly not the disillusioned sighs of the dogs as they sniffed hopelessly at some mermaid's purse or stray fisherman's-cork stranded on this uninteresting beach.

When Vivien had read right through this first letter four times, and many sentences of it much oftener until she knew them by heart and yet every time she re-read them found a new thrill, she tucked the envelope away to crackle exquisitely against her heart and stood up straight in the sunlight.

"Dogs! dogs! dogs! dogs!" she cried at the top of her voice. The dogs, who were naturally delighted to respond to any exuberance of the human spirit, all barked their loudest in reply. "I love him! I love him! I love him, and he loves me!" she cried; and the dogs, although the exact nature of the animal eluded them for the moment, rushed wildly hither and thither to drive it from its lair, for they felt convinced that it must be a very exciting animal indeed which could cause even the usually restrained Miss Vivien to shout like this.

"Have you got it, Carrots?" asked William, the oldest spaniel.

"No, but I think it ran this way," the setter replied.

"Mr. Jones has got it," Bracken, the other setter, whoofed.

But Mr. Jones, the wire-haired terrier, yapped a denial.

"Only a starfish leg. I made a slight mistake."

"Jemima and Spot are after it," Carrots shrieked excitably.

The other four dogs rushed up the slope of the cliff, only to find that Spot and Jemima were pursuing the shadow of a gull across the bluebells.

"Look out, you duffers, she's going round by the shore," William growled.

The six dogs rushed madly down the cliff again to chase each other round and round across the sands this side of Greenwater, to play Canute with the contemptuous waves, and finally to stand in a row by the tide's edge and bark ferocious threats to a school of porpoises lolloping past of what they would do with them if they dared land on Roon.

When Vivien reached Greenwater the dogs at once set off up the valley toward home, and they had a most grateful surprise when on looking back they realized that their mistress proposed to continue right round the towans.

"My whiskers, girls and boys," Mr. Jones yapped, "it's some walk after all."

Whereupon all the six dogs turned and came barking after Vivien as if she had only that second turned the handle of the kennel-yard door.

A gloom fell on them again a moment later, because no sooner had Vivien reached the blackthorn coppice on the headland than she sat down to read that letter all over again.

"Phew!" Bracken sighed, his head between his two front paws, "we might as well have gone home after all."

Vivien began to address the radiant air.

"I mustn't sit here, my sweetheart, for if I do and the sentries come round the corner they'll see you sitting here beside me with your arms round me."

"Wag your tails," William urged. "I don't think she's speaking to us, but she may be, and it would be the worst of bad manners not to show her we heard."

So every dog thumped his tail and looked up intelligently over his paws.

"You dears, you're so sympathetic, aren't you?" Vivien exclaimed. "Come along."

"What did I tell you?" said William, as the dogs sprang up and the interrupted walk was resumed. "You trust a spaniel, Mr. Jones, and remember that politeness costs nothing. Now don't start whining," he said later, when by the fence over which Dick had helped her that day Vivien sat down to read a page of the letter for the tenth time. "Just keep perfectly calm, and in my opinion we shall be invited to scramble through this fence presently. And it's five bones to a biscuit we shall get a rabbit on the sides of Big Tor."

But William lost his bet, for when the joyous moment came to see the rabbits scuttling into the gorse-clumps where it was so much easier to deal with them than in their holes, not a rabbit was visible.

"Queer," said William. "Very queer."

"What's that?" Carrots asked with a suppressed growl.

"Something deuced uncanny," said Mr. Jones, his back bristling. Bracken, Spot, and Jemima barked loudly.

From the other side of Big Tor came the sound of men's voices mingled with the thud of pickaxes and the grating of shovels.

"They can't be!" Vivien whispered, as with beating heart and

thudding pulses she walked round the foot of Big Tor toward the menacing noise.

"Whoof!" said William. "Whatever is it?"

"Whoof!" said Carrots. "What can it be?"

"Whoof!" said Bracken. "It sounds very dangerous."

"Whoof!" said Spot. "It certainly does."

"Whoof!" said Jemima. "I don't like it at all."

"Whoof!" said Mr. Jones. "I think I'll walk behind you, Mr. William."

And then suddenly Captain Bickerstaff came into view. He was standing on a tumulus and superintending the excavations of half the garrison who were flinging the sacred earth of Big Tor in all directions.

"You vile mongrel," all the six dogs barked in furious chorus as they rushed forward and ordered Captain Bickerstaff to get off that barrow immediately unless he wanted his boots chewed off his feet.

"Do you mind calling away your dogs, please?" he said to Vivien, who white as death was staring at the desecration of the soil.

"You mustn't dig here," she gasped. "Please tell your men to stop at once. This is where the cromlechs are."

Captain Bickerstaff smiled wearily.

"Not cromlechs, Miss Romare—I am addressing Miss Romare?—not cromlechs. A cromlech is the name given by careful archæologists to the tombs which are found surrounded by stone circles. These tombs ought not even to be called dolmens. One aspires to a practical terminology. Their size hardly warrants their being called dolmens. These are a series of cists. A most interesting series, and apparently untouched, which is of course very remarkable indeed. I've only opened one so far, and the contents are likely to prove intensely interesting. I shall hope to add quite a little chapter to our knowledge of neolithic funerary observances. If you'll call off your dogs, Miss Romare, I'll get down and show you the one we've already opened. It's so fortunate that the strategic position created by these two little hills gave me a genuine opportunity to combine military necessity with the pleasures of archæology. You'll be glad to hear that I shall be able to open the whole line before we finish our trench. I was going to send one of my men up to let your father know what I was doing. I think he'll be interested, eh?"

"He'll be furious," said Vivien.

"Oh, I don't fancy so. Young Deverell suggested that your father would not like it, but I told him that I was sure there was nothing that Sir Morgan Romare would appreciate more than that a competent archaeologist should conduct a careful excavation. I was talking to your father two or three days ago about it, and he seemed very pleased at the idea and invited me very warmly to come up to the House and look over his little museum."

"My father agreed to dig up the cromlechs?" Vivien exclaimed. "I don't believe you."

"Tut-tut! Now you must not call them cromlechs, Miss Romare. Cist. C-I-S-T. Your dogs seem to be getting used to me. Good doggies! That's right, let me get down."

The dogs had to presume Captain Bickerstaff's friendliness from the fact that this antipathetic horse-faced creature with ill-fitting tough leggings was being talked to by their mistress. He seemed an odd taste, but the whims of human beings were unaccountable, and though it took a good deal of sniffing to reassure them they allowed him to point out the opened tomb without directly interfering.

Vivien stared down into the cavity from which the big flat stone had been pulled back, and trembled with horror.

"Of course they were probably buried squatting on their haunches," said Captain Bickerstaff, pointing cheerfully to the two skeletons that lay facing one another in a distorted attitude. "Lots of pottery," he added. "That was to give them something in which to cook their food in the next world. A droll idea! But what I find so interesting is that circle of small sea-urchin shells."

"Fairy loaves," Vivien whispered, tears in her whisper.

"Precisely! You have noticed the superficial resemblance. Now yesterday, while I was examining the shells in the little cove you call Greenwater, though personally I didn't think the water particularly greener there than the water anywhere else, I found one of these loaf-like shells of the echinus or sea-urchin. Evidently those poor people fancied that these loaves would feed them in the next world. Now, if you look in the cist, you'll see some other shells which might have been picked up on any of the beaches here to-day. Of course I know that the shell is one of the symbols of eternity, but I fancy that this conjunction with the echini means that they were put in for food. However, one must not be tempted into rash speculation. We shall see what the other cists have to show us. There must be nearly twenty of them. It really is most interesting.

The fibulæ are mostly of bone you will notice, but we must not be led by that into allotting too early a date. I should doubt if we can ascribe a date much earlier than 1500 B.C. to these remains. And you certainly might expect to find a few bronze ornaments, for the style of the cist belongs emphatically to the early bronze period. Nor must you be confused by the fact that inhumation rather than incineration has been used. Inhumation and incineration overlap in the most perplexing way. However, this first cist is promising—really most promising—and by the time I have opened all the others I dare say I shall be able to give you a little more positive information."

These words brought Vivien back to herself.

"I'm going at once to fetch my father, Captain Bickerstaff. He will explain to you that you have done something that we consider wicked and monstrous. We have cared for these tombs as if they were the tombs of our own ancestors, and you have done something that can never be forgiven."

Vivien turned to the men. They had been Dick's men. Surely they would understand her if she appealed to them. Then in despair of their sullen sweating faces she looked back to the tomb and saw the huddled skeletons lying there with the sun shining down on the equipment of that last fearful journey through eternity. She put her hand to her heart, and it seemed as if Dick's letter crackled like ice in the chill that gripped her being.

"You will all be cursed by what you have done," she said in a low voice, and as she spoke two of the dogs threw up their heads, howling.

18

BROTHER AND SISTER

Although the Knight took immediate steps to put an end to Bickerstaff's archæological investigations, Vivien did not consider that he was nearly enough shocked by the outrage. Both he and Murdo seemed inclined to think that she was giving way to an exaggerated superstition.

"It was a piece of confounded impudence on the part of that fellow Bickerstaff," the Knight allowed. "But what can you expect

when you get these bounders licensed by the war to strut about in fancy dress and given an authority which they lack either the breeding or the intelligence to use properly? However, he won't dig up any more of the tombs, and though I was very much tempted to remove the contents of the one that was opened and put them . . ."

"Father!" Vivien exclaimed in dismay. "Well, if you had, I would have put you on a level with the worst bounder in the world."

Sir Morgan smiled at his son.

"You see what a spitfire your sister has become? By gad, boy, I'm beginning to think that it was she who ought to have put on khaki. 'Pon my soul, I don't know why they don't raise a few regiments of Amazons. Anyway," he went on to his daughter, "you needn't worry your head any more. The stone has been put back in its place, and the tomb is sealed up again."

Even Venetia would not allow that any harm could have been done to them by the action of the new commanding officer.

"I think you're worrying yourself too much, Vivien. I've been out a lot these last nights and really I haven't felt a bit that the island was angry with us. And I'm positive I would have known at once if it had been."

Holt was the most sympathetic with Vivien's apprehensions and forebodings.

"I don't like it, miss. I do feel blessed uneasy. I'm bothered if I haven't had a prickling in the soles of my feet ever since the deed was done. I wish we could have a drop of good rain. I kept the barley back, but I can't keep it back no longer. And you might so well sow in an ashpan as sow in Big Scowen. Law! 'tis dry as dry can be. And I've never known the water in the big well so low in April month since I were on Roon."

Murdo's brief leave drew to a close. He must be off on May Day morning.

Vivien resolved to make an effort on that last evening to confide in her brother, and while the Knight was dressing for dinner she begged him to walk for a while with her in the garden.

The pleasure garden of Romare's House was one of the few places on Roon that Vivien could not associate with Dick. She and Venetia had once taken him hurriedly round in the early days of his time here, but their father was too often to be found pacing up and down those ilex-shaded walks to make it a suitable haunt for them when it was undesirable to let Dick's company be too

conspicuous. Yet that tree-loving Romare who planted it might have fancied that in the years to come it would be a rare trysting-place for the passionate daughters of his house. It seemed to have been planned only for lovers and birds and meditative scholars. The three acres of level ground on the eastern brow of the island, which legend said was once a fold for deer in the days when Roon was a famous chase, were surrounded by granite walls fifteen feet high, and the whole enclosure was divided into ten oblongs of unequal size by double rows of ilex-trees so closely planted and trimmed as to form walls themselves, the space between them being occupied by walks running north and south or east and west with never a curve to mar their symmetry. The three central oblongs were shut in all round by trees, but the others were open on the sides bordered by the wide grass path that circumscribed the garden below the grey walls, beyond which belts of trees kept out all winds except the west. But even westward, where the granite coping ran naked across the sky, no sooner had the fierce wind stormed the fifteen-foot wall than it was reduced to impotence by the cross-rows of ilex-trees it encountered at the end of the first three oblongs, so that even during the worst gales it was calm nearly everywhere within. The wife of the tree-loving Romare who made this garden had been astrologically inclined, as various works of starry lore inscribed with Dame Eleanor's name in her own fine hand still testified on the library shelves, and for a fancy she had named the original nine oblongs after the solar family. This good and curious lady had been in her grave long before the discovery of Neptune, for whom a space had been robbed from Mercury, because it would have been unseemly for the Romares to neglect the celebration of a planet which more than any might be supposed to shed his dim and watery influence upon the fortunes of their house. But apart from this addition the offspring of much of Dame Eleanor's learned fancy had endured to the present.

Thus in Saturn, the darkest enclosure in the heart of the garden, there still flourished hemlock and white hellebore, mandrake, pale mauve poppies, henbane and rue—his own herbs. His trees also survived—cypresses, yews and sallows. In Jupiter was a pomegranate with flame-red flowers every year, but never a fruit. There grew the fig, the almond, and the cherry which he loves, violets too and mint, peonies and gilliflowers, and the rose called Hebe's Lip. In Mars only a clump of the old crimson hawthorns remained in a corner; the rest of him was now a tennis-court. The parterres

of the Sun were cut solar wise, with long rays of Maréchal Niels and a glowing heart of Persian Yellows for his noontide splendour, with tea-roses of every hue for his cadency, and for his setting a round bed of old damask-roses deep red and very sweet. And Venus still kept her lilies and her daffodils, her peaches, her apricots and apples, and her white roses.

To Neptune was dedicated the first leafy quadrangle that one encountered coming into the garden from the rhododendron shrubbery—and surely it seems wise to let Vivien and Murdo go ahead of us through that wooden door in the high granite wall and while Vivien is talking about every subject in the world except the one that particularly concerns this tale take this opportunity to describe at any rate the exterior of Romare's House.

The form of it was that of a T-shaped or St. Anthony's cross laid north and south. The western arm consisted of the girls' tower, the kitchens, and the servants' quarters; and thought at various times it had been considerably altered the stones of which it was built had most of them been hewn five hundred years ago. The main limb was a queer conglomeration of architecture. Regarded from the west it appeared like a low gabled house of the seventeenth century which had been lengthened by the addition of a barbarous two-storied villa of the early 'seventies, surrounded by the most complicated arrangement of tumbledown conservatories ever seen. Regarded from the east the low gabled seventeenth century house had turned into a tall and austere Georgian house which must have been built against the other and owing to the fall of the ground achieved a couple of extra stories. Alongside this was the villa of the early 'seventies displaying from this aspect its hideous proportions, gaunt windows, and naked stucco without so much as a creeper to hide it. Finally to complete the strange mixture the eastern arm of the cross, which included the chapel and the library, was built of granite in the best attempt at the perpendicular style that local builders and architects could provide in Tudor times. From the east end of the chapel a low wall cut off the road, and in the centre of this wall between two pillars surmounted by heraldic mermen was a beautifully wrought iron gate through which one saw the sea sparkling below. On the south side the level grass enclosure with nothing to break its smoothness except the great mulberry-tree was bounded by a massive bank above which rose the high garden wall. Presumably at one time the main-entrance to the

House was on this side, but no sign remained of it now except the disused gateway; and the front door (if one may speak of a front door on an island where the pier is really the front door) was on the other side. The north façade, separated from the farm buildings by a flagged and cobbled court in the centre of which rose the great circular parapet of the well covered with a gabled canopy of stone tiles, presented the appearance of a castle with its small windows and heavy crenellation. Yet, in spite of the confused styles, in spite of the mingled beauty and ugliness, the severity contradicted by gentleness, this strange pile of buildings managed somehow to be very definitely what it claimed to be—Romare's House; and its complete effect achieved a profoundly impressive personality, any attempt at the anxious description of which must inevitably fail, because such a description can only convey the externals of changing taste without being able to provide the underlying unity that was conferred by the same people living in the same circumscribed place in what through all the centuries had remained fundamentally the same way.

The brother and sister had strolled twice round the garden, now toward the orange west barred with slim purple clouds, now southward where the young moon was high and bright in the stone-blue sky above the sombre domes of the pine-trees in the Knight's Walk, now eastward whence the slaty dusk was creeping on from Lyonesse, now toward the pearly north, and now toward the orange west again where the slim purple clouds were welding into one. They had passed by the lily-pool in Neptune, and Mercury whose mildewed image looked silyly out from a tangle of laburnums. They had passed by the great oblong of the Sun, for not a rose was yet in bloom this May Day eve and the brass dial on its green-rusted copper pedestal, chill-seeming, no longer marked the hour. They had passed by the Moon, where the night-opening flowers, save here and there an unseasonable evening primrose, waited for July. They had passed by shadowy Saturn and the tennis-court of Mars. They had passed by the tall tulips in Herschel, the swelling peonies in Jupiter. Even the first apple-blossom and the pheasant-eyes in Venus they had passed by. But when they came to Earth, which was a small green round between Sun and Moon facing the western sky, they turned aside through the double row of bee-hives along the path. The roundness of Earth had been got by filling in the corners with lilacs and mock-oranges. Half buried in the lilac at the far end was a semicircular stone seat, on the back of which

were carved the arms of the Romares—on a field vert a mermaid regardant or, holding her two tails in her hands and crowned with an antique crown, within a bordure wavy argent. The crest was a chevalier in complete armour proper with sword drawn and visor raised riding at full speed on a horse vert, the supporters two mermen in armour vert with scimitars and circular bucklers argent, the motto: *Romare per mare*. Here the brother and sister sat for awhile in silence.

"Lilac's about my favourite flower-smell, I think," said Vivien at last.

Murdo sniffed the warm air appreciatively.

"It is jolly good, isn't it? But I say, oughtn't we to be going in to dinner? We mustn't be late on my last night."

"There's plenty of time yet," she urged. "Your last night! Father will miss you terribly."

"Yes, you know, I was rather surprised to find what a success I was with the old boy this time. Odd really. Because he was so very much up in the air about my going into the Service. You don't think he's breaking up?"

"Murdo! Why should he?"

"Well, I don't know. Something's wrong with him—I mean to say—he never used to take my arm and all that sort of thing, but now he can't walk a yard without catching hold of me. I felt rather embarrassed once or twice, I don't mind telling you."

"Oh, I thought you meant breaking up in another way," Vivien said.

"What way?"

"Well, I think he's frightfully hard up. And Holt told me that Father swore he couldn't afford to go on running the farm at a loss much longer. Poor Holt was in tears about it. I don't know what will happen if we don't soon get some rain. Holt was counting on picking up a bit over the steers, but he's beginning to be afraid there won't be any feed for them by July, and it means an awful loss if he has to sell them before Christmas. Of course it may not be as bad as Father pretends to Holt, but somehow I think it is. And then I know he'll start gambling again as soon as the war is over," she sighed.

"Perhaps he'll make it up that way," her brother suggested.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Murdo, don't you start talking like that. I don't believe anybody ever makes up for anything by gambling. Suppose we were to lose Roan?"

"Lose Roon, my dear girl? Why, you must be mad to think of such a thing," he exclaimed. "There's a good deal of difference between being temporarily too hard up to indulge old Holt in whatever he wants for the farm and losing Roon. What on earth put such a mad idea into your head?"

"Oh, I've had it for a long time at the back of my mind," Vivien replied.

"Well, the sooner you get rid of such nonsense the better. I always thought you were sensible."

"Did you, Murdo? Yes, I suppose you always did," she said pensively. "But that was when you were younger than me. You're much older now. You're so much older that I'm afraid to tell you something I want to tell you."

"You fathead!" he laughed. "Fancy being afraid of me. 'Ha-ha' twice. But look here, I say, come on, we must go in."

"No, no, wait a minute or two. Please, Murdo."

She felt that between him and her stretched an immense estranging sea of perfumed lilac which somehow she must cross.

"You won't laugh at what I'm going to tell you?"

"I'll try not to."

"Because if you laugh, Murdo, it will break something between you and me that can never be mended. I don't care what else you do, but you mustn't laugh."

"All right. But don't get so beastly theatrical about it, or I *shall* laugh."

"No, I don't think I will tell you," she said quickly.

"Vivien, you really are a comedian. Go on. Rowel yourself and take the fence. I'll give you ten seconds. If you haven't cleared it by then, I'm going indoors."

"Well, let's walk round the garden again," she said. "I think I'll be able to tell you more easily walking along."

Murdo sighed lustily.

"You know I'll tell you what it is. I've got out of touch with girls' ways lately."

She took his arm, and they turned in under the ilex-trees that darkled the alley between Sun and Earth. Vivien felt that her heart was fluttering like the alarmed blackbirds which flew down the path before them.

"You've heard me talk a good deal about the man who was in command here—the man you met," she began.

"Have I?" said Murdo. "You only asked me what he said when

I told you I saw him at Paddington, and when I told you I couldn't remember what a passing stranger said in a railway-station you seemed so hurt that I said no more. And you've not mentioned him since as far as I can remember except to say that he would never have dug up the cromlechs like that other blighter, who looks more like a sandwichman than a soldier."

"Well, *did* you like him?"

"There you go again! How the dickens can I possibly tell you if I like a man from a casual glance at a railway-station?"

"Yes, but you saw him at Nantivet Road in October, and he told me how charming you were."

"Considering that I didn't know if I was standing on my head or my heels and had a terrific needle about going out to join my battalion in France, I don't see how he could have told anything about me. He probably talked about me to melt the frost here. Poor devil, I expect he had a pretty rotten time with you all at first."

"Yes, he did," Vivien said. "And I was the rottenest of them all to him. I resented his coming here and your going away. But afterwards—afterwards—well, afterwards, I fell in love with him, and now I've told you my secret."

Murdo stopped dead in the path, looked round at his sister's face, looked away again at the pearly evening sky glimmering through the branches, and finally whistled softly in amazement.

"Does anybody else know you're—you're"—the phrase was too much for Murdo—"that you rather like him?" he said in qualification.

"Venetia knows."

"Well, I hope this fellow Deverell didn't guess anything, that's all. Of course, he may *not*. But still he *may*."

"May what?"

"Well, he may go crowing round the forty-fourth Rutlands, or whatever regiment it is, about the success he had on Roan."

"You really are a damned fool, Murdo," Vivien burst out. "Why on earth should a man who's in love with me crow about it?"

"Oh, he's—er—keen on you, is he?"

"Of course he is. That's what I told you."

"You didn't. You said you rather liked *him*. But look here," Murdo exclaimed, the future bursting on him in a blaze of light, "if he's keen on you and you rather like him, I suppose you'll be getting engaged?"

"I suppose we shall."

"Yes, but I mean, who is he? I suppose he's all right. Has he got any money or anything? I mean, you can't get engaged to a fellow without knowing anything about him. What will Father say?"

"We can't say anything to Father till the war's over. But, Murdo, you'll be on our side, won't you? If you like him and stick up for him, Father won't be difficult. Venetia likes him most awfully."

"Venetia!" Murdo exclaimed. "You talk as if Venetia were grown up, my dear girl."

"Venetia knows jolly well who's worth while in this world," said Vivien warmly. "And so do I, if it comes to that. Anyway, you might appreciate my telling you. I'm not asking you to do anything now. I only want you not to be prejudiced. Murdo, please try to understand. Don't go on getting older and older every time you go back to the front so that when the war's over you'll have grown away from me altogether. If you told me that you loved some girl, I'd want to think her the most marvellous creature in the world. . . ."

"Yes, well, all right, my dear girl, but don't go on talking about me being in love, which I may add sounds simply idiotic. I suppose I shall have to think about marrying one day, but by that time perhaps it won't sound so silly. You know, I rather wish you hadn't told me about this man Deverell. Suppose I meet him out there? What on earth am I going to say to him? I shall feel a most holy ass. You see, I can't help being a bit prejudiced against him."

"Why should you be?"

"Well, you're bound to be prejudiced against a man who thinks he's keen on your sister. It stands to reason you would be."

"Why?"

"Why? Well, because it makes you feel such a holy ass. I told you, didn't I?"

A gong crashed upon the air.

"I say, come on," Murdo exclaimed. "I knew we should be late. Father'll be dancing around like a town major."

They were walking along the path by Sun and Earth and Moon. Suddenly Murdo stopped.

"Good-bye, old garden," he murmured.

The western sky was still a warm rose; but the purple bars were gone, and now across the glow stretched a huge grey ostrich-plume of cloud. To Vivien it seemed a menacing and funereal shape.

"Don't say 'good-bye' like that," she cried. "Oh, Murdo, you frightened me. Ever since I saw those skeletons in the sunlight I have had such a dread of the future. Darling boy, do forgive me if I was cross with you over things. Kiss me."

Murdo's dark eyes were soft as he leaned down to her mouth.

"Anything to oblige," he murmured, a faint smile on his lips that looked so red under their small dark moustache. "And I'm sorry if I was uffish," he added.

"He did like you awfully. He really did," Vivien said.

They hurried through the faded rose and grey of the dusk, through the green glooms of the rhododendrons to the lights of the House.

"I say, you are a couple!" Venetia exclaimed when they arrived in the dining-room. "We're all having cocktails to-night. And Father mixed them himself. Mine's an absolute stinger."

"Where in fortune have you both been?" Sir Morgan demanded.

But he could not be angry with Murdo on this last night, even for keeping him waiting ten minutes for dinner.

And the next morning the Knight of Roon crossed over to Penzawn with his son—a journey he had not taken for over two years.

19

WAR

If Captain Bickerstaff was to be denied the satisfaction of exploring the tombs, he did not intend to be deterred without a struggle from digging those trenches. Colonel Manton had received a strong letter from the Knight of Roon about his subordinate's unwarrantable activities, and he had been rather frightened by the suggestion that heavy compensation would be demanded unless an end were put to Captain Bickerstaff's archæological zeal. He could understand a farmer's claim for damage caused by military necessity. Moreover, his own superiors could understand a claim like that. It was a self-evident proposition that if you dug up a man's barley you paid him for a bumper crop. But digging up a man's neolithic remains was another matter, and the War Office people might make it unpleasant for him if he involved them in an awkward

dispute with the owner of Roon. They would hardly have a tariff for antiquities, and people like this Sir Morgan Romare often had friends in both Houses of Parliament. The Military Authorities might have nearly succeeded in suppressing the House of Commons, but they had not been so successful in curbing the House of Lords. Some interfering peer might get up and ask questions about Roon, and Colonel Manton knew that no government ever forgave the man who was the cause of a question being asked in Parliament about its vagaries. Where would be his C.M.G. then? The Colonel was undoubtedly wise to take no risks. Joseph's brethren are as envious nowadays of coats with many colours as they always were. So, Colonel Manton, fearing greatly for his C.M.G., sent across a peremptory order that Captain Bickerstaff should abandon immediately his proposed line of trenches if by constructing such a line he was liable to upset the owner of Roon. This was Captain Bickerstaff's opportunity, and he proceeded to take full advantage of it, with the result that every other day Colonel Manton received from him a series of argumentative communications of which the following may be taken as typical:

*Island of Roon,
Wednesday, May 16, 1918.*

Sir,

With reference to your letter perhaps wrongly dated May 14, but dispatched to me on the afternoon of May 15, and only received by me this morning, I have the honour to point out once again that unless I am given authority to construct a line of trenches to protect the northerly coast of Roon, I cannot accept the responsibility of defending the island against attack. Furthermore, I have the honour to observe that one of the first necessities for my arrangements to guard against the appropinquation . . .

The Colonel stopped and rubbed his nose reflectively.

"This fellow knows how to write," he thought, and he decided to get that word off on the Director of Home Intelligence in his next report. He noted it down in pencil on his blotting-pad, counting the "p's" twice to be sure he had them correct before he resumed Captain Bickerstaff's letter.

. . . appropinquation of hostile submarines (see your communications of the 28th ult., the 2nd inst., the 7th inst., and the 11th

inst.) is the erection of suitable watch towers extending in a line from the N.E. point of Roon (marked in map number 3 as Former Oyster Beds) and the N.W. point of the towans (marked in map number 3 as Whitelady Rock). I have the honour to argue that in my opinion at least four towers are necessary, and I hope that you will give my recommendation your most careful attention. I can make arrangements to billet a certain number of the Royal Engineers on Roon, and with the summer before us there is no reason why a working party of the same should not cross every morning from Penzawn and return at night. Furthermore, I have the honour to point out for your attention that the last consignment of jam arrived here with two jars missing. Perhaps you will be good enough to go into this matter with the D.A.Q.M.G. Finally I have the honour to express my strong conviction that half-a-dozen men and N.C.O. from the Signalling Corps should be sent immediately to Roon. I have already taken occasion (see my letters of the 26th ult., the 1st inst. the 3rd inst., the 7th inst., the 11th inst., and the 14th inst.) to urge the advisability of this step which I consider vital to the proper invigilation of Roon and Carrackoon. I have attempted to instruct the men I have under my command at present in the rudiments of signalling, but they seem quite incapable of learning even so much.

I have the honour to acknowledge your information with regard to recommending me for the M.B.E. at the first suitable opportunity, for which I thank you. But I had hoped to earn a D.S.O., and possibly you may see your way clear to recommend this decoration instead. A colleague of mine was recently awarded the D.S.O. for lecturing to the men behind the lines on military history.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

*W. Bickerstaff,
Capt.*

Colonel Manton made several efforts to unload this thankless and officious prig on other commands, but not one colonel occupied with the defence of the British Isles would have him. In despair of the land Colonel Manton tried the ocean and almost implored the S.N.O. Porthmear to utilize his services. He nearly added "or drown him for me." But Captain Hodson-Snell, C.M.G., R.N., replied that he was unaware of any position in which Captain

Bickerstaff's valuable services could be usefully employed. In the end Colonel Manton decided that the June weather was at last fine enough and calm enough to make a personal visit of inspection to Roon where he might hope to reduce this intolerable agitator to silence.

Meanwhile, things were going badly on the island. The drought endured without bearing really fine weather. Chill easterly and northerly winds predominated for the whole of May, which dried up the pasture, yellowed the young barley and seared the oats. The rabbits finding the grass too poor for their taste invaded the cornfields in greater numbers every day. The steers searching for food invaded the cliffs, where one of them fell over to be smashed up by the rocks of the western shores. Another fell over at high tide, and three or four days afterward the swollen carcass with one leg sticking out of the water floated round the north side of the island and was mistaken for a submarine with periscope just visible. Finally it was decided to cut the loss and sell the rest of them immediately to a grazier on the mainland. Yet, on the very day that the grazier came over to conclude the bargain, another of the steers got itself wedged in a fissure of the outcrop, and John Holt in going down the cliff to put the poor brute out of its agony slipped on the burnished turf and broke his arm. So Holt had to be taken over to Penzawn and put in the cottage hospital whence he was perfectly sure that he should never again emerge, in which belief his wife did all she could to encourage him, deriving as she did a great deal of satisfaction from the reflected glory of the accident and much enjoying the way so many of the people in Penzawn inquired affectionately after the dear old man's progress. She used to go over dressed in complete black and visit the hospital accompanied by a widowed friend of hers, a Mrs. Allbones, with whom she used to discuss in lugubrious whispers her solitary future in this vale of tears, the pair of them sitting beside poor old Holt's bed and eyeing him as a couple of crows eye a sick sheep.

"I bean't never coming out of here, miss," said Holt to Vivien, when she and Venetia were visiting him in the hospital for the first time after the accident.

"Don't be so silly, Holt," they protested.

"Never!" he repeated firmly.

And then pulling the bedclothes over his head with his uninjured arm he fell a-sobbing like a child.

"Holt," said Venetia softly and tenderly.

But the old man still sobbed.

"Holt," she called again more loudly, but still most tenderly, "you haven't seen my pony yet."

The old man popped his head out from the bedclothes for all the world like a battered Punch in the puppet-theatre.

"I don't *want* to hear about the pony, miss. What's the use of talking to I about ponies when I'll never see pony or horse again except a pair of long black tails from my own coffin?" With this he retired under the bedclothes again.

Vivien thought it was time to try a little severity.

"Holt, it's rude and unkind of you to bury your head in the bedclothes when Venetia and I come to see you. You haven't even looked at the sweet-williams we've brought you—the first of them, and you know they're your favourite flowers."

"You'll be picking sweet-williams for my grave soon, miss," said the old man. "I be like to die at any moment."

"Pooh! bah! pooh! bah!" Venetia scoffed.

"No, an' you can't make I sit up and take notice by mimicking I," he declared obstinately.

"Do you see my new hat, Holt?" Venetia asked.

"Yes, I can see it. My eyes is all I have left to me."

"Do you like it?"

"It don't look too bad. More after the style of a man than a maid, though."

"Feel how light it is."

The old man balanced on the palm of his available hand Venetia's wide-brimmed squash hat of what looked like a rough brown felt.

"My goodness, it is light, isn't it?" he exclaimed. "My goodness, I'm bothered if that bean't a good hat."

"I'm going to put it on your head," Venetia announced.

"But I be in my nightshirt, miss."

"That doesn't matter."

"But the nurses will think I'm Guy Fawkes Guy if I start a-putting on hats in bed."

However, she insisted.

"Well, does it feel all right?"

"Oh, it do feel all right, miss. I don't reckon it do weigh more nor a dandelion-clock."

"Now, listen to me, Holt. If you shut up crying any more like a kid," said Venetia, "I'll give you that hat for the summer."

"You will?"

The little girl nodded. "And listen, Holt," she went on.

"I am listening, miss. This hat don't cover the ears like some hats do."

"What fur do you think it's made of?"

"I don't know that. It might be most any kind of fur."

"It's made of hare's fur."

"You don't say? Law! 'tis a pity we han't got never a hare on Roon. Oh dear, when I think of the Jack hares I've snared as a boy. And many the floggings my poor old father gave I for it. But he allus put the hare in the pot after he'd done taching I to keep my hands from picking and staling," the old man added with a cunning twinkle in his bright blue eyes.

"I asked Ernie Pascoe to guess what fur this hat was made of," Venetia went on.

"You did? I bet Ernie never told 'ee."

"I gave him three gusseses."

"You might so well have given him three hundred. He'd never have answered true, not in all the years of his martel life."

"First of all he guessed a sheep."

"Bah!" Holt ejaculated contemptuously. "Sheep! Odds, he might so well ha' said pig, the poor mommet!"

"And then he guessed a kangaroo."

Holt chuckled.

"I'm bothered if that bean't Ernie right enough! Law! Ever since he see the kangaroo in London on a bank holiday excursion he've been talking about 'un ever since. When they gets up to their larks down to the Inn of an evening, 'tis a proper game to put Ernie on the table and set him to ape the way kangaroos do hop, and Ernie's so proud as piecrust to do it for 'em, poor soul! Kangaroo! Ha-ha-ha!"

"So I said to him 'Only one more guess, Ernie. And it's an *English* animal.' And what do you think Ernie guessed? He said, 'It wouldn't be a lion, would it, miss?'"

This was too much for Holt. He threw back his head and shook the bed and rattled the thermometer on the wall with his laughter.

"I'm bothered if that bean't the best I've heard yet. Oh dear, oh dear, you've made I sweat wi' laughing. And I mustn't slap my leg the same as I would if I were about, because my arm be all wrapped up in a mould and set so hard as a cornflour pudding. 'Tis plaster of parish,' says the doctor to I. 'Well, 'tis a blessed

tight parish,' I says, 'and if the bachelors of this parish get tied up so tight as my arm the spinsters won't do too bad.' "

"You're looking better, Holt," said Vivien.

"I'm feeling better, miss," he replied. "Miss Venetia have made I laugh, and that's done me a power of good. You see, my wife do come and sit one side o' the bed and sigh and groan and look at me very mournful, and when I turns my head away there's a widow-woman, a friend of hers in Penzawn, sitting on the other side groaning and sighing. 'Poor fellow, he do look bad, Mrs. Holt. I remember when my poor husband was just going he turned up his eyes and looked just like poor Mr. Holt there.' 'Oh, dear me, Mrs. Allbones,' says my wife, mopping her eyes, 'what a picture you do give anybody!' 'But he made a beautiful end, Mrs. Holt,' the widow-woman answers, mopping *her* eyes. 'Oh, I don't doubt but what he did, Mrs. Allbones, such a religious-minded man as he always were,' says my wife very meaning. 'Yes,' the widow-woman says, 'yes, Mrs. Holt, he set up in bed and called out to me, "Oh, Maria, I can see my loving Maker sitting over there in the best arm-chair where the doctor belongs to sit."' 'Oh, if only Holt could make a beautiful end like that,' says my wife. 'I declare 'tis like the Infant Samuel.' And then the widow goes on, 'Well, of course it give me a bit of a start, Mrs. Holt, and I turned my head where Allbones was staring, and I hadn't turned my head not half a second before I heard a noise like the water running out of a sink, and when I looked round sharp Allbones was gone.' 'Lovely,' says my wife, beginning to howl like a babby. And before I knew what I were doing, I'm beggared if I weren't howling away wi' the pair of them for a man I never spoke to civil since he sold me a litter of young pigs from a mezzled districk fifteen years ago come Lady Day eve. Bah!"

Then the girls, for fear lest the memory of Mrs. Allbones and Mrs. Holt should cause a return of his pessimism, told him more stories about what was happening on Roon while he was away. Sergeant Gusborne, it appeared, had renewed his courtship of Janie Pascoe much to Ernie's anxiety.

"A-look now," said the old man, shaking his head and clicking his tongue.

"And some of the men have been egging Ernie on to learn to shoot," Venetia related. "One of the garrison said he could mesmerize Ernie into shooting straighter than anybody in the army. 'But if I shoot *too* straight,' Ernie said, 'they'll take me for a

soldier, and I'll have to leave sergeant to do what he's always had a mind.' "

"That were a bit clever of Ernie, that were," the old man twinkled. "I'd never have thought he'd have had the sense to say that."

"But the one who mesmerized him—Haddaway's his name—said that if they came for him he'd mesmerize him to shoot worse than ever. So the other evening they fixed up a target, and every time Ernie fired with the air-gun somebody rang a bell, and when it was over they said Ernie had hit the bull's-eye sixteen times in fourteen shots, and he believed them."

"He'd believe anything, the poor open-mouthed gobbet," Holt commented. "Anything he'd believe!"

"And they chaired him all round the big barn, and then they pretended to take his photograph aiming at the full moon. They said if it were published in the papers the Germans would be so frightened of a man who could hit a bull's-eye sixteen times in fourteen shots that the war would come to an end at once."

"But you know they ought to be a bit careful and not get too forum-snorum," said Holt. "Ernie has a funny temper, Ernie has, and it wouldn't do to leave him get playing around wi' a real gun, or there might be trouble. Guns is funny things to play with. We had a bailiff on Roon in Sir Morven's day, and a gun busted his hand and he were dancing around calling out to I, 'Oh dear, oh dear, Holt, be I hurt?' There's a silly man for you. Bah! How could I tell 'un if he were hurt? And another time I bought a gun for two-pence, and the first time I fired 'un the nipple come off. 'No more of that for I,' I said, and I sold 'un for thruppence, because I found out as that gun had killed one man already. I reckon it were worth more nor thruppence to be rid of 'un. And it isn't on'y guns that's queer martels. Powder can be funny too. I remember one fine Christmas morning years and years ago on Roon I were shooting on the towans wi' three chaps called Savage, Tripe, and Snipe, and I were wearing a new coat of woollen worsted which a young lady gave I, who my wife never knew nothing about, because this was afore ever I met her. And that Christmas another young leddy give I half a dozen cigars. So I were a bit proud of myself. Well, afore we begun our shooting I put the lighted cigar I were smoking away in my new jacket, and without thinking I puts it plumb in my powder-flask. Odds! All they Christmas cigars come ripping out through the new coat like bullets. 'You're burning, Holt,' says

Savage, Tripe and Snipe. And so I were. And that spiled both my young leddies' Christmas presents. Yes, guns be queer martels, and Ernie bean't fit to handle suchlike."

"Well, the sooner you get well, the sooner you'll be back on Roon," said Vivien. "And you're wanted back. It's not fair to lie there and think you're never going to get better."

"I'll put a bit of heart in it, Miss," Holt promised. "I'm bothered if they sweet-williams don't smell a trate."

And when the girls took leave of him he dabbed at his forehead with all his old verve.

Holt had been right in thinking that it was unwise to play tricks with Ernie Pascoe beyond a certain point. Two or three nights later he managed to get hold of one of the men's rifles, and when the sergeant was washing his hands in the outhouse to the usual accompaniment of Janie's amorous giggles, the jealous husband took a shot at the pair of them. Fortunately he was not under the mesmeric influence of Haddaway at the time, and only succeeded in hitting the cuckoo-clock on the kitchen mantelpiece—a poetic justice on that ill-omened bird. Of course, the awkward business was explained away as another piece of Ernie's stupidity; but everybody knew that a tragedy might easily have happened. It sobered the men for a time; but the effect did not last long, and gradually the behaviour of the whole garrison deteriorated again. They neither liked nor respected their commanding officer, and his untactful handling made them lazy and neglectful when they were on duty, mischievous and sullen when they were at leisure. The drinking at the Inn increased; so too did the thefts of eggs and poultry, and the illicit snaring of rabbits; nor was the sergeant the only one who tried to amuse himself with the women of the island. A spirit of evil seemed to be at work.

This was the state of affairs when Colonel Manton arrived at Midsummer to inspect the defences of Roon and Carrackoon, protected as he hoped against Bickerstaff by a chinless A.D.C. and a staff-officer of the third grade, the latter of whom had been so badly gassed in the previous Autumn that he was put out of action by Bickerstaff in the first hour, and had to spend the rest of the morning sitting in the shade of the elm-tree at the bottom of the drive, where Venetia riding past on her pony and liking his looks brought him some lunch from the Inn. It seemed he had met Dick and had found him a capital fellow. So Venetia galloped off on Cerberus, which the pony had been called before she found out that she

had meant to call him Pegasus. She had decided that like so many other things in life it was only a detail and had kept to the first name.

"For I'm sure if he hasn't got three heads," she had told her sister, "you'd think he had, the way he pulls."

Venetia could not find Vivien anywhere, and regretfully had to abandon her plan of introducing her to this pleasant kind of man who knew Dick and liked him.

Captain Bickerstaff, in spite of his corns, nearly killed Colonel Manton and the chinless A.D.C., who was hardly capable even of quacking the faintest "quite" by the time the inspection was over.

"I should like you to see my signalling station on Rosevean Point, Colonel."

"How far is that from here?" the Colonel gasped. They were standing by the big quarry at the time.

"Oh, not far. You can't call anything really far on an island this size."

"I don't know about that," the Colonel grumbled. "It's a great deal bigger than I supposed it was."

"What would you say was its exact circumference?" Bickerstaff asked in his melancholy inquisitorial voice.

"I don't know at all," the Colonel barked.

"What would you say?"

This to the A.D.C., who tried to look calculating and acute, but only managed to gape.

"Five miles seven furlongs six perches two yards one foot and seven and half inches," Bickerstaff proclaimed triumphantly. "I measured it very carefully."

"Well, I'm not going to walk all round it to find if you're wrong," said the Colonel with heavy jocularly.

"Quite," murmured the A.D.C.

"But I'm anxious for you to see this observation-post on Rosevean Point," Bickerstaff persisted. "It won't occupy us long; we can take a short cut through those blackthorns."

Private Wilkins was on guard at Rosevean Point. He was leaning against the flagstaff which his Captain had erected here, and by the suddenness with which he pulled himself together on hearing voices he had probably been dozing in the midsummer sun.

"Stand up straight, you—what's your name?" the Colonel growled fiercely, for that short cut had not improved his temper.

"Wilkins, sir."

"What?"

"Wilkins, sir. You arst me my name. It's Wilkins."

"Well, Wilkins," the Colonel pompously inquired, "are you enjoying yourself on this island?"

"No, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, no, sir."

"You ought to be out in France. That's where you ought to be," the Colonel bellowed.

"Yes, sir," Wilkins agreed cheerfully.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I ought to be out in France, sir. I was thinking to myself when you come along, sir, as I ought to be out in France. I was thinking there'd be a bit more room to turn round there than what there is here, sir."

"This man doesn't appreciate his good luck," the Colonel said to Bickerstaff.

"I'm afraid not, Colonel."

"Quite," murmured the A.D.C.

"That's a very stupid fellow you've got there," said the Colonel when they left the signalling-post, as if he expected Bickerstaff to apologize for Wilkins's mental deficiency.

"Yes, they're all very stupid," Bickerstaff admitted sadly. "I'm afraid the Army doesn't encourage brains. Before the war I used to think schoolboys unnaturally stupid, but looking back at them now I fancy that they were comparatively bright."

The Colonel cleared his throat.

"What is our next objective?" he demanded shortly.

"Well, I think now you'd better examine the ground where I am proposing to put these trenches."

"Is that far from here?"

"Along the north coast of the island."

"Then, which is this?" the Colonel asked.

"This is the south," said Bickerstaff, with a tired contemptuous smile.

"Then why on earth, if you wanted me to examine the north side, did you bring me right out of my way?"

"We have the whole day before us," said Bickerstaff.

"We've nothing of the kind," the Colonel snapped. "I'm going back at three, and I want to see the owner of the island before I go."

But Bickerstaff was relentless, and by the time he had dragged the Colonel to Romare's Watchmen, the beetroot quality of the latter's countenance had deepened to the hue of an egg-plant. He had scarcely enough energy even to swear when he collapsed exhausted upon a bank of sea-holly, still less to argue with Bickerstaff about the line of trenches he proposed to dig along the towans.

"Put them where you like," he panted. "What about our lunch? Probably Sir Morgan Romare would like me to lunch with him."

But when about ten minutes to one Colonel Manton presented himself at the House he found that Sir Morgan Romare had no desire whatever for his company. While he was waiting in the hall, the entrance to which his A.D.C. had only found with the greatest difficulty, a horrid little girl with red hair came and stared at him for a moment before she rushed away shouting at the top of an objectionably shrill voice:

"Father! Father! Here's that old colonel from Penzawn waiting to see you, and it's nearly lunch-time. Father, where are you? Do tell Siddle to go and send him away."

A suit of late fifteenth-century armour, the brigandines covered with golden-studded velvet, seemed to challenge his intrusion. The portraits on the walls looked coldly down at him. The atmosphere was entirely inhospitable. And then a butler arrived with a message from Sir Morgan that he was too busy to interview Colonel Manton.

The Colonel was halfway down the drive before his choler would let him speak.

"That was a piece of deliberate and calculated insolence, Worsley-Browne," he said to his A.D.C.

"Quite," the young man murmured.

"I won't stay another minute. Tell Bickerstaff I'm going back to Penzawn at once."

The A.D.C. hurried on ahead.

But when Colonel Manton reached the harbour he found that it was dry.

"You won't get away till half-past three," said Bickerstaff. "So after we've had a little lunch you may as well accompany me to Carrackoon. I've got a rowing-boat waiting for us at Rosevean steps."

The G.S.O. came up at this moment.

"Ah, there you are, sir," he said. "Charming place this, isn't it? I met a most delightful little girl with red hair who fed me with beer and biscuits. We must come over here again, sir. I'd no idea

it was such a charming place. If you don't look out, Bickerstaff, I shall be putting in for your job."

Colonel Manton could not reply. He was led away by Bickerstaff and the A.D.C., deposited in a rickety wicker armchair, and fed on damp tinned-tongue to the accompaniment of innumerable questions, suggestions, and flies. After lunch he refused to inspect Carrackoon, and for nearly two hours stalked up and down the pier in the sun until the *Mermaid* was afloat. Dick was amply avenged for the day when Colonel Manton refused to believe that some harbours dry out at low tide.

"I've done well," said the G.S.O., arriving on the quay just when it was time to start. "My little red-haired friend has presented me with these."

He held up a couple of fine lobsters.

"I suppose I shall have to hand one over to you, Colonel?" he added with mock ruefulness.

"I don't want it," the Colonel growled. "Lobster always disagrees with me. I don't know if the little red-haired girl who gave you those things was the same little red-haired girl I saw. If it was, Neville, I thought her a most objectionable child. One of these modern children that I simply cannot stand."

And when the party of inspection landed at Penzawn it must have looked to the passers-by as if Worsley-Browne, the A.D.C., was carrying one very large lobster and Neville, the G.S.O., a couple of smaller ones.

Bickerstaff lost no time in getting to work on his trenches when the Colonel had departed, unlikely ever again to reddon Roon with his countenance. But those sand-hills did not lend themselves to military excavation. Almost as fast as the men dug in the hot sun the sand slipped down upon them. They were like ants in the toils of an ant-lion. In the end even Bickerstaff's obstinacy was baffled, and he gave orders to abandon the experiment. Then one morning he woke up with a wonderful idea. Why not fix up a wooden look-out platform on the top of Romare's Watchmen and dig away the sand all round them? He managed to dig away the sand so that on either side of the semicircle of great stones there was a wide gap to the beach; but the platform itself was not a success. Romare's Watchmen did not like that platform, which came to grief the first day that Midgley and Flanark mounted guard upon it.

"I've had about enough of Captain Blinking Bickerstaff," Midgley said to Flanark, rubbing his head.

"I've had blinking well more than enough of the silly mug," said Flanark, rubbing his leg. "What's 'e think we are? Ackerabacks? It wouldn't take me much to push him accidentally for the purpose over the cliff when he's nosing around one night."

"Nor it wouldn't me, Flanark. Not 'arf, it wouldn't, I give you my word."

"Now Deverell with all his funny 'abits were a gentleman."

"You're right," Midgley agreed, sucking a tooth sagaciously.

"But this Captain Blinking Bickerstaff—well, if I seed that—that——"

"Barstid," Midgley suggested.

"Well, nobody couldn't call him nothing else, could they? I arst you."

"That's what he is," Midgley declared.

"Well, if I seed him drowning before my blooming eyes, I'd spit in the blooming water to make it a bit deeper," Flanark vowed ferociously. "Spit my 'ardest I would."

And this was the spirit that was in every one of the garrison. Their hot work in the sand made them drink harder when they were off duty. Their hard drinking corrupted their point of view about everything. All through the summer they deteriorated and deteriorated. Evil crept round the island far more stealthily than Captain Bickerstaff when he crept round like a schoolmaster coming to his classroom on tiptoe.

Meanwhile Venetia rode her chestnut pony as if every moment she was not on his back was wasted. Sir Morgan shut himself up in his library to work out a new system that seemed to promise more splendid triumphs at roulette than any he had known at baccarat. All day long and sometimes far into the night the click of the dancing ball could be heard. All day long and sometimes far into the night he would sit poring over the columns of figures that his pencil had jotted down. Murdo wrote cheerfully of a wonderful plan that Foch was supposed to have up his sleeve, and the Knight emerging from his library for a day or two would give Venetia lessons in Latin, French, German, or Italian, tire of them quickly, and return to work at his system more feverishly than ever, since by the way Murdo wrote the end of this accursed war was at last in sight.

And away out in secluded folds of the cliffs Vivien sat buried in the high bracken reading those crackling letters from France, and at night, linked with Dick by that mild moon of summer which shone down on both of them, she wrote her love, sitting by the casement

open to the east. At least she sat thus for one serene night. By the next morning Captain Bickerstaff complained of the illumination from the lamp, and thenceforth she had to draw the curtains while she was writing.

"Which is just as well," Venetia said. "Because the moths tickle my nose."

Occasionally the two girls went into Penzawn and visited friends, the chief of whom was Penfold, the Controller of the Palatinate, a dear little pink-faced man who looked much faded by four years of Colonel Manton.

"Ah, my dear Vivien! Ah, my dear Venetia—what a rate you're growing at, Venetia! I ought to come over and call on your father; I've been very neglectful lately."

"Better not," they advised him as they advised everybody else. "Better not; Father's in one of his moods."

"You can't expect him to be in anything else," Penfold sighed.

Holt in spite of his wife, who when she found he was not going to die, spoke with a gloomy relish of amputation, came back to Roon as well as ever sometime after the middle of July where he made a great ado about the cutting up of the towans.

"I don't like it," he said, "I don't like it not at all. Sand be trickier stuff to play with than women. 'Tis drifting in already, and when the winter gales come we'll have half the feed spiled. Law! Sir Morgan never ought to have left 'un start monkeying about with it. Years ago when I first come to Roon Sir Morven took it into his head one day to plough up the turf this side of the Tors and plant it wi' taters. Bah! 'Twere fowr good years afore a man could cross over it in a gale of wind the sand blew so thick. And 'twere another ten years afore we got it level again, for when the sand had done blowing and the grass began to grow 'twere nothing but a maze of hillocks. It used to be lovely with ladies' fingers, and my goodness, didn't the cattle munch 'em up! But they've never grown so well since it were ploughed. They used to be spread so thick as butter. And then Sir Morven must needs plough 'em up for taters. That were the time Billy Dunstan and me found the skelington of a babby which the wind had turned up in the sand. That were a bit funny, that were, because there'd been a tourist fellow drowned that autumn and a reward of two pounds was offered for his body. So Billy and me walked right around Roon twice of a Sunday morning to see if we could happen on it tucked away under a rock. But we never found the body and no one ever had the two pounds. Only,

coming home to dinner, we saw this little babby's skelington laying on its back and twitching a bit in the wind, which made Billy and I feel a bit of a twitch ourselves. Yes, sand be martel queer stuff to monkey with," Holt concluded. "Look see, Miss Vivien, the white of it never touched the big patch of rushes afore."

It was Vivien who was walking with the old man to inspect the damage done to the towans in his absence. And he spoke truly, for the uprooting of the marram-grass which bound the shifting dunes had allowed the sand to spread, so that for some way beyond the inland slope the ground was sprinkled as if by snow. Here and there, too, it had formed shallow drifts in which the last shell-pink blossoms of the burnet-roses looked like the convolvulus on the shore.

"I expect the grass will cover it again soon," said Vivien hopefully.

"Ah, but the grass don't grow too well in this dry weather, miss. They never ought to have been left to do it. And all they gaps cut through to the beach! 'Tis just wilful foolishness, and Sir Morgan ought to have known better than ever to leave 'em do it."

They were standing by a great oval of sea-rushes with steel-bright tips, from the thicket of which standards of eglantine in full bloom escaped, whose thorns were rich as fire-opals beheld thus against the sun. Innumerable burnet moths were hatching from cocoons fastened to the blades of the rushes, their upper wings like glacy green old broadcloth spotted with claret, their underwings full crimson. For a time they crawled up and down the blades, vibrating; but presently with feeble flight they fluttered forth to mate, and within five minutes the still air scintillated with a myriad rubies.

"Ten o'clock sleepers," Holt commented. "But they be pretty little butterflies when you looks at 'em."

"Ten o'clock sleepers?"

"That's what we did always call 'em when I were a lad, because they'd never be about betimes."

On the hither side of the rushes was a tract of ragwort in golden flower, here and there a plant swarming with the velvet-ringed black and orange caterpillars of the cinnabar moth, another wandering ruby of the cliffs. Then hawking high up in the spangled air they saw a great dragon-fly in aquamarine armour, and so still was the morning that the whirr of his spun-glass wings plainly audible made old Holt duck his head.

"Bah, I don't like they horse-stingers," he muttered.

"He won't hurt you," said Vivien.

"I bean't going to give the beggar a chance," he replied with considerable emphasis.

Glittering rushes; rubied moths; golden ragwort; lucid rose and white of eglantine; powdered rose and white of bramble-bloom; trim rose and white of rest-harrow; rose of storksbill, white of stitchwort, rosy white of euphrasy starring the short turf; scent of thyme; sweep of green bracken up the Tors; low splash of a blue sea melting on a hot white beach; infinity of blue sky above; flickering dance of blue butterflies below; this was Summer indeed. And Vivien, though she deplored the way Bickerstaff had hacked up the towans, could not at this moment imagine those wintry gales of which Holt spoke so forebodingly. Why was not Dick here beside her now? Ah, wasted azure, worthless gold!

The croak of a raven sounded high above them.

"They be regular masters, them birds," said Holt, shading his eyes to catch a sight of those jagged pinions against the sky.

Croak! Croak!

"Aye, there they be, coming home from a day in Penzawn. Boy Alec said he saw the five of 'em a day or two back setting on the top of the church tower wi' a parcel of jackydaws flying round 'em and squawking like mad. But they old two ravens don't care for nobody. We had another pair of 'em once, and they got a bit too sharp wi' the lambs. So one day Sir Morven said to I, 'Holt,' he said, 'take yon dead lamb and put a drop of strychnine in its eyes.' And I did, and the ravens come down and pecked the eyes and dropped over dead in a flash. Oh dear, that was a bit wicked, wasn't it?" said the old man, opening wide his own bright blue eyes and twinkling at the recollection of the sinister deed.

Croak! Croak! Croak! Croak! Croak!

There they were, the five of them, flying with leisurely wings toward their home on the west cliffs where they would live together amicably enough until a month or two hence when the parents would drive the young ones away.

"Why, there's the *Mermaid* coming back," Vivien exclaimed, looking out to sea. "Did she go over to Penzawn again this morning?"

"Did she go over again? Odds, she's always going over these days with something or other as that proctoring pernicky Bickerstaff do want fetched or carried."

By the time they had reached the old elm at the head of the harbour the boat was already moored to the quay; and Hamblyn

was walking very slowly along the pier, his head bent, a telegram sticking out of his rugged old fist.

Vivien turned pale.

"Holt, Holt," she whispered, "Something horrible has happened. Holt, I'm frightened." She caught his hand in hers.

The old man looked up at her with scared eyes, and they waited aghast while the boatman with heavy steps drew nearer.

"Good day, Cap'n Hamblyn," said Holt in an anxious quavery voice. "That be something for the sojers you're carrying there, bean't it, Cap'n Hamblyn?"

The old boatman put up his hand to hide from himself the sight of Vivien's face.

"God forgive me, miss, I bring ill news," he groaned.

"What news do 'ee bring, man?" Holt cried in a voice that was like the feeble echo of a remote shriek. "Speak up, and tell us. Speak up, Cap'n Hamblyn."

"The worst news that any man could bring to Roon," the boatman groaned. "The worst news and the heaviest."

Holt let go of Vivien and pointed at him a bony accusing hand.

"It bean't the young master, Cap'n Hamblyn? No it bean't him? It bean't our boy, Cap'n Hamblyn?"

The old boatman's head sank down on his breast.

"Damn their blood! Damn their blood!" Holt choked. "But speak man! He be no more nor wowed? They haven't killed him?"

"They've killed the young master. 'Tis wrote here. Ah, my dear maid, don't look at me," the old boatman groaned. "Don't look at me, my dear maid . . . my dear maid!"

"How do 'ee know 'tis wrote there?" Holt demanded, snatching at the telegram. "Maybe someone have lied to 'ee, Cap'n Hamblyn."

"The young woman to the post-office told me, Mr. Holt. She did say how sorry she were."

"I'll take the telegram," said Vivien in a voice of ice. "I'll have to tell my father."

She swayed for a moment, recovered herself, and with eyes like stone walked up the hill toward Romare's House.

20

PEACE

The Knight of Roon was in his library, which even on this bright July morning was sombrous enough on account of the rows of old calf-bound books, the many aumbries and almarioles and the heavily leaded casements of thick beryl-green glass. It was a high room with a railed ambulatory running round it two-thirds of the height, which with its two carrols for secluded study was reached by a stone stairway coiling up through a turret. The hammerbeam roof was of dark oak; the fireplaces hooded in the Tudor style. The Knight was seated at a long draw-table of cherry wood which age and use had polished to a coffee-coloured lustre of great richness. The frame of this table was carved with a chain of squares and rosaced circles; the bulbous legs were heavily gadrooned; the top was inlaid with a lozenged parqueterie of yew, beech, and walnut round the cognizances of Romare in bog oak. In front of him was a small roulette wheel, at his left hand a greencloth properly stencilled into divisions for the various methods of marking one's stake, at his right hand numerous sheets of paper closely covered with figures, and all round him were porcelain patch-boxes filled with the diverse shells he used for counters.

"Don't speak to me for a moment," he said, preparing to jot down the statistics of the last spin. "Let me see . . . *noir* . . . *impair* . . . *passe* . . ."

"I wish I hadn't got to speak to you, Father," his daughter replied in a frozen voice.

"*Troisième douzaine* . . . what's the matter?" he asked sharply. "Did you shut the door behind you? I felt a draught then."

"It wasn't the wind, Father. It was the news I have to break to you," said Vivien, clutching at a finial on one of the carved box-chairs. Her sea-blue eyes now burned dark as uncut sapphires in the pallor of her face. She stood there against the green-glowing casements like some painted shadow of a princess in an old picture.

"News about . . . about Murdo?" the Knight stammered, a rillet of shells trickling through his unclosing fingers to patter down upon

the table and floor. "Not the worst news? He's not been killed? Answer me, girl. Answer me!" he cried harshly.

Vivien's lips moved like a rose in a sudden breath of wind; but no sound came from them, as like a blighted petal the telegram dropped from her hand upon the table.

"You might leave me alone now," the Knight muttered. "Quite alone . . . d'ye hear? Alone."

She knew that any word from her would only add to the bitterness of her father's grief. She left him sitting there in his dim library, staring before him like a hawk lost in a world of ice.

"There's only you and me now," said Venetia, when later that day the two sisters were standing in their brother's empty room. "So, we've simply got . . . simply . . ." the little girl broke off.

"What?"

"Oh, I don't know. I just started talking, and then I found I hadn't really got anything to say."

"And I criticized him when he was home," Vivien said sorrowfully. "What a selfish brute I am!"

"You didn't really criticize him, darling. It was only because you were worried over Dick."

"Dick!"

"Vivien dearest, don't fret about Dick. I know he'll come back to you. I warned you about Murdo. I always did expect that he was going to be killed. I felt it all over me."

"Oh, won't this war ever stop—ever—ever?" Vivien cried flinging herself down across Murdo's bed in a surge of tears.

That weary Summer seemed endless. For a time the disaster that had fallen upon the Romares produced a good effect on the behaviour of the island people. At the Requiem for Murdo the Chapel was crowded, and even such members of the garrison as were not on duty all came. But gradually the spirit of evil reasserted its power. Nearly every night there were squabbles and drunken brawls, which became so bad at last that Bickerstaff obtained authority to close the Inn altogether. But this did not stop the drinking, because means were always found to smuggle over spirit from the mainland, and finally Sir Morgan forbade his daughters to leave the House until the garrison evacuated the island.

A letter Venetia wrote to Dick that Autumn gives a picture of the existence she and Vivien were leading.

Romare's House,
Island of Roon.
October 11th, 1918.

My dearest Dick,

This is about the aniversery of the day you and me met in Penzawn. So I am writing you a letter. Vivien is very well, but we are both very coopy because Father has forbidden us to go out which is more than a trifel damnible. So I have taken advantidge of the compulserly confinement to work at French and other things very hard, and I have been reading a poetry writer called Browning. Have you read this writer's poetry? I like some of it and some of it I do not like, and I have read some poetry by John Keats which is better than the poetry of Browning, and I read a book called The yellow aster and a book called The woman who did and some books by Henry Kingsley which I like better than Charles Kingsley. Some of them are ripping, and I strongly recommend you to read them. And I read some of Hume's History of England which is not very good, and the History of the Popes by a man called Ranke which isn't very good either, and that's all that I've read except Black Beauty for the third time. Father does'nt go out. He is still inventing a sistem for roulette. He has never spoken a word about poor Murdo. Not one word since that day in July. But sometimes he gives me a lesson in Italian and German. Why Father has forbidden us to go out is because the garrison is getting very rough. This man Bickerstarf—I expect I've spelt his name somewhat inaccurately but it isn't worth bothering about—this man Bicerstaf—oh bother whatever he is h'es a most damnible idiat. Two of the garrison caught hold of one of our girls, Loveday, and kissed her when she did not want to be kissed much and she had histirrics, and since then Vivien and I have been shut up. I will not tell you much about Vivien because words fail me to give you an adequate idea of how sweet she is to me. Father looks at her coldly sometimes which Vivien thinks is because he is wishing that she was dead and not Murdo. We talk about you a lot and we hope that the war will be over soon and that you will come back here and marry Vivien, or if that can't be maniged for the moment come back. Vivien is writing to you at this moment so I need not send you her love which would make this letter a trifel heavy. I'm glad you've been made a captain if you like it, but I would'nt get very excited if you were made a general because nothing anybody is made in this war is worth being made. They are howling a song

down by the harbour and the moon is very red to-night. Love and kisses

From your loving

Venetia.

P.S.—I wish the war could be over on my birthday which will be in nineteen days now, but of course we won't have a party this year. Still I'll be fourteen which is always something.

The war was not over on Venetia's birthday, but it was over very soon afterwards. Armistice night was not a happy night on Roon. Sir Morgan was approached to know if he would give permission to have a great bonfire on the top of Penmarrack to celebrate the occasion. It was Jervis, the head-gardener, who voiced the general desire after Holt, Hamblyn, and Sam Hockin had one after another refused to take upon himself the burden of asking the Knight to agree to something that they knew he would hate.

Jervis in the opinion of the girls possessed only one quality that could be admired. He was a hard worker. Otherwise he shared with Siddle and Tom Bell, the estate accountant who was away at the front, their profound distrust. Jervis was a man of over sixty, but his hair was still as red as the fox he was generally supposed to resemble. Murdo and Vivien used to tease Venetia when she was small by telling her that when she grew up she would look like Jervis.

"I won't look like him. I won't, I won't!" she used to protest passionately. "And if I do I'll skin myself all over, and then I won't."

"The people have asked me to ask, Sir Morgan, if you would let them have a bit of a bonfire to-night," Jervis said, rubbing his hands along his apron, after he had arranged a sheaf of cherry-bright Kaffir lilies in a bowl of black enamel that stood on a Gothic livery-robe, his excuse for intruding.

"Why?" the Knight inquired with a discouraging frown.

"Well, they were wanting to have a bit of an illumination on account of this German armistice, Sir Morgan."

"How does that affect Roon?"

"Why, Sir Morgan, it's the end of the war," said Jervis.

"Get out," said the Knight abruptly. "And take those infernal red flowers with you."

Jervis paused in the doorway.

"Beg pardon, Sir Morgan, did you wish me to understand that you wouldn't allow a bonfire?"

"Anybody who chooses may light a bonfire," said the Knight. "And anybody who does so will leave Roon tomorrow morning for good."

Down the hill Sergeant Gusborne was suggesting to Captain Bickerstaff that it would be a gracious act to allow the Inn to open that night.

"The men feel a bit of relief from the strain, sir," said the sergeant confidentially, "and I think it might be as well to give 'em a bit of rope for once in a way."

"I cannot open the Inn on my own responsibility, sergeant," said Bickerstaff. "Nor in any case do I think it desirable that the Inn should be opened."

"Well, sir, I'm presooming to argufy with you, I know, but I think you're making a bit of a mistake."

"Perhaps I am a better judge of that than you, sergeant."

"Very good, sir. But the men is likely to be a bit rorty to-night, and my idea was that, if they could have a bit of jollification at the Inn, the evening might pass off pleasant. And if there's any trouble, sir . . ."

"Trouble?" Bickerstaff repeated. "If there's any trouble I imagine that the sentries on duty will take steps to deal with it."

"Sentries?" the sergeant gasped. "But you won't be having any sentries out to-night, sir?"

"Certainly I shall. The war is not over, sergeant, though of course we all hope it soon will be," Bickerstaff said, with as much sincerity of accent as one who already smelt the hot-water pipes of a Garford class-room could muster.

At six o'clock, Flanark, Mackilligin and Wilkins demanded to know when the Inn was going to be open. Sergeant Gusborne, who had postponed breaking the news to the men of their captain's refusal to allow a proper celebration to be made, parleyed.

"All right, lads, don't get too anxious. I expect it'll be opened presently."

Then he made another attempt to induce the Captain to reconsider his veto, but to no purpose.

"Look here, boys," said Flanark, "I've been mucked about long enough by Captain Blinking Bickerstaff. If they won't open the Inn for us, we'll open it for ourselves."

"Ooray, Flanark," Mackilligan shouted. "Give me hold of a crowbar somebody."

"No need to break into the Inn, Mackilligin," Midgley shouted.

"The drink's stored in an outhouse. Come on, Wilkins, you and me can show 'em where it is."

A few minutes later half a dozen of the men were thundering on the door of the old cockpit. Hockin tried to interfere, but he was quickly hustled indoors again and told he would be wiser to stay there. Hamblyn, hearing the din from his cottage round the corner, set off up the hill to summon help. But he could find nobody except Holt and Ernie Pascoe. Carlow was out with his snares; the carters and under-gardeners had slipped down across Bareppa Meadow to join in the fun.

"Better leave 'em drink the barrels dry," Holt advised. "We can't do nothing ourselves. And if we fetch out Sir Morgan he might get knocked on the head."

"Why don't that blasted Bickerstaff do summat?" the old boatman growled.

"Ah, bah!" Holt scoffed.

As a matter of fact, Bickerstaff, to do him justice, was quite prepared to tackle his men, even if it came to using those pistols of his. But Sergeant Gusborne, who feared the worst might happen if he fell foul of them in their present mood, managed to hide the weapons. At the same time he persuaded two or three of the less violent of the men to interpose between him and the others should things look nasty.

It did not take long to get out the drink; and for two hours it was like Bedlam at the bottom of the hill. Then somebody suggested a bonfire.

"Let's burn the blurry barracks where we bin so lovely and comfortable all these months," one of the men yelled.

"If you don't desist from this clamour," said Bickerstaff, "I can promise that it will be the worse for you."

"Oh, you naughty men, will you desist?" mocked a falsetto voice (it sounded like Midgley's). "Oh, girls, pursue me, I'm full of nuts!"

"Shut your mouth," another threatened from the rear, "or we'll shovel you on top of the blurry fire."

By the irony of circumstance this was about the only night that Sergeant Gusborne had been genuinely sober since he came to Roon, and he was feeling thoroughly scared by the men's behaviour.

"For goodness' sake, sir, let 'em have their bonfire," he muttered to Bickerstaff. "Look, they've got bonfires blazing all round Penzawn. We can't go wrong if we let 'em have a bit of a blaze here.

Give me the word, sir, and we'll get a good one started out in the meadow where there won't be no mischief done. They'll only burn the barracks down if we aren't careful."

In the end Bickerstaff gave permission for the bonfire. But he had left it too late. The men, who were now completely out of hand, did not care what they burnt, so that the flames roared higher until the murky November sky above glared with an immense rufous stain. They did not actually burn the barracks, but by the time the bonfire was finished they had burnt most of the woodwork and left the mere shell of a building. They burnt many fences and gates, and trees too, sousing the hacked trunks with the contents of Sir Morgan's drums of oil.

Vivien and Venetia heard the demoniac row in their room at the top of the tower, and trembled to see the leaping shadows of the fire. Fearful lest their father might sally forth and try to quell the riot, they hurried over to the farmhouse to invoke Holt's aid.

But when the Knight of Roon came out of his library at last, he did not go down the hill. He sent instead for his bailiff.

"Holt, are any of my people down there?" he asked.

"The carters and the under-gardeners and the carpenter's mate, that's all, Sir Morgan."

"See that they leave Roon by nine o'clock to-morrow morning, Holt."

"Yes, Sir Morgan. You won't go down yourself, Sir Morgan?" he added anxiously.

"Why should I go down?"

"I was afeard you might try and stop the noise, and I were thinking as 'twould on'y make 'em worse so like as not."

"Those poor fools down there can only destroy my trees and my fences and my gates," the Knight said scornfully. Then, fixing Holt with his ice-blue eyes, he asked in a voice edged with hate: "What of the fools who destroyed my son?"

"Ah, God forgive us all," the old man muttered with a sob.

21

LOVERS' MEETING

A week after the Armistice the garrison which for thirteen months had offended Roon and Carrackoon left as it came in a drifter, Bickerstaff and all. For more than a fortnight after they were gone the south-west wind blew fiercely with hardly any cessation, as if the two islands had invoked its aid to purify them from the defilement of that incubus.

The boisterous weather hindered a full appreciation of the blessed relief, the exquisite liberty and peace, that the withdrawal of the garrison meant. Moreover, Holt was fretful about the men whom the Knight had so summarily turned off. This was the weather that piled the sea-wrack high on the beaches, the sea-wrack that enriched the land with gold of wheat and barley and butter, the sea-wrack that returned all and more that was robbed from it by the salt winds and the salt spray. There it lay heaped in huge glutinous masses waiting to be dragged up from the beach and spread thick on the hungry fields.

"Never mind, Holt," said the Knight. "We won't farm quite so high in future. Let the wrack go this year."

"But we've bin treating the land light for the last three years, Sir Morgan. We must have more hands. I thought when the beggar-ing war were done as you'd leave me have a few more men. But I'm bothered if I bean't more scrimped than ever I were. We can't do the work. Carlow don't get round to his snares because he do have to give a hand wi' the horses. Ernie Pascoe don't have time for nothing, and I'm so fretted wi' thinking how to work the farm I can't do a good job of work myself."

"Never mind, Holt, Tom Bell will be demobilized presently, and when he gets back we'll go into the whole question of the upkeep and expenses of the farm. I shall be away after Christmas and I shall want a certain amount of ready money, so you'll have to make the best of being short-handed. I've said the same thing to Jervis, and I've told Rawlins he'll have to do without a carpenter's mate in future. I must economize."

"'Tis sinful to leave that beautiful wrack bide where it lays. I were down on the north beach on'y this morning and I could ha'

cried to see it. 'Tis just what we want if we're going to put Nanjizel Top down to lucerne next year as I'd a mind to. But 'tis clover-sick now. And Little Scowen be crying out for food. I han't hardly the heart to walk across 'un and see the shameful way the poor little beggar be starved. And that were always a good-hearted field. We never had a field wi' more heart to do his best. 'Tis plumb wicked to starve Little Scowen. And Bareppa Meadow do want ploughing up. We'd have some pretty spring wheat there. I'd reckon to lose myself in it wi' fair weather. Punchbowl do need a good dressing wi' slag, and the grass at the head of Greenwater be a proper disgrace. 'Tis full of moss. Full as a tick. But if we could put the scarifier over 'un two or three times and wrack 'un well on top, why, we should have as good grass in April month as ever we had."

"I tell you it's no use, Holt. I've no doubt you're right, but I can't afford it," said the Knight irritably.

"And I'm a bit bothered about the towans where they danged sojers mucked up the sand. Every time I do go down to the beach the sand's heaped a bit higher on each side of them blessed gaps they fools cut through to the beach. 'Tisn't too bad now wi' the wind blowing southerly, but if we get 'un a bit northerly I'm bothered if we won't have the sand on top of us. There's acres of good feed will be spiled if it do. And where we'll feed the steers I don't know."

"I'm not going to keep any more steers. I told you to sell every bull calf from now on. And when Tom Bell comes back I'll let you know what we'll do with the heifers."

"Tom Bell! Tom Bell!" the old man grumbled. "Why, I do understand women better than Tom Bell do understand a farm. And I don't understand women not at all."

But all John Holt's protests were unavailing. The Knight of Roon seemed to have conceived what nearly amounted to a hatred of the island since the death of his heir. As for his daughters, their future meant no more to him at this time than the future of his fields and meadows. Vivien suffered a good deal from this attitude, but Venetia was defiant of it.

"I think you're silly to get yourself so glumpy over things," she said. "If Father chooses to let the island go to pieces just to spite us, I don't care. Damn! So long as you have Dick what does anything matter? I promised Holt I'd help him with the horses, and you can manage the garden. Besides, this won't last. Father'll go

abroad after Christmas, and when he comes back he'll be quite different."

"Yes, but suppose he gambles Roon away with everything else?" Vivien asked.

"He couldn't ever do that."

"You don't know what he might do in his present humour."

This made Venetia grave for a moment.

"Oh, well, but I don't believe the island would let him," she said at last, frowning to herself.

The notion that her father could lose Roon worried her, and a day or two after this conversation she returned to the subject.

"You don't really think that Father could ever gamble away Roon, Vivien?"

"I think he could now."

"But, Vivien, you can't imagine us anywhere else. Of course, if you marry Dick I suppose you'll live somewhere else at first, but it'll be somewhere quite close. Oh, Vivien, you might live at Carrackoon, if Dick could get hold of it. And then one day you and Dick would live on Roon again. And I expect you'd have a son. Don't you think you probably would? Of course he wouldn't be the Knight of Roon, I suppose. But he'd be almost the Knight. We could make a joke about that. We'd call him the afternoon of Roon. But if we didn't have Roon at all and you were married to Dick and I was left with Father . . ."

The little girl burst into tears.

"Dearest, I wouldn't marry Dick if I had to leave you alone even on Roon," said Vivien, comforting her. "And as for leaving you to travel round the continent with Father, why, you surely can't imagine that I would ever do that?"

Venetia remembered that heroic resolution of hers even to die were it necessary for Vivien's happiness.

"But I wouldn't let you spoil everything for yourself because of me," she declared, wrinkling away the tears by a brave effort. "I hate reading about people who sacrifice themselves in books. I always get angry with them for being so stupid. I always want to argue with them and ask them why they are so silly. So, please don't sacrifice yourself for me, Vivien, because it would make me feel most frightfully uncomfortable. It would, honestly. Oh, why aren't I grown up? I think people ought to be considered grown up when they're fourteen. It says in *Everybody's Pocket Encyclopedia* that in England the marriage age for a woman is

twelve; so it's nonsense to keep girls back the way they are kept back."

"Well, I think you're growing up quite terribly fast enough," Vivien laughed.

"No, it's nothing to laugh at, Vivien. I'm not going to let you be miserable on my account. Oh goodness, I do wish Dick would come back so that we could talk over the future."

"In the last letter I had he says he's sure to get leave soon. And now do be a dear and work at your history," her sister begged.

"But I don't want to read any more about those beastly Georges, who are just a lot of fat pink pigs in wigs. Oh, why, why, did the Highlanders stop at Derby? I hate history. All the beastly people always win—Ulysses and Augustus and Edward the First and Edward the Fourth and Bloody Elizabeth and Cromwell and William the Third and the Georges. I wish I could have stabbed Cromwell in his bath. Only, I don't suppose the brute ever had a bath, do you?"

"Well, you must do your history," Vivien insisted. "And you know you really like it best of all your lessons."

Venetia groaned.

"It's such a lovely day, and we've had rotten weather for weeks. I wanted to go out for a ride on Cerberus. And I suppose you're going for a walk while I swot at this hellish Congress of Vienna."

"Well, if you like, I'll stay in with you," Vivien offered.

"No, of course, I don't really want you to stay in," Venetia said quickly. "I'd hate you to stay in. You know I would, don't you, Vivien?"

Vivien hesitated. She did feel that it was hard on her little sister to leave her wrestling with the hucksterers of a century ago while she was enjoying this crystalline December day after all that dreary wind.

"I won't open this book till you're gone," Venetia declared. "And you can't make anybody open a book against her will."

This was an allusion to the forcible closing of a book the other day that Vivien had decided was not the kind of literature on which her young sister was likely to thrive.

"All right," she promised, "I won't go far, and I'll come back for you in an hour."

Vivien was anxious that morning. For five days now there had been no letter from Dick, and the absence of it had made her more than ever depressed about the future. When Dick wrote so confidently about their hopes and plans, it seemed absurd to be pessimistic. But during these last empty days with the wind ceaselessly

howling round the tower all the old fears had been quickened. And then this morning when she had woken to the serene December sunlight she had felt quite sure that there would be a letter from him. All sorts of fancies troubled her. Could her father have discovered that she and Dick were writing to each other? Or was he ill? But if he were ill, he would have found some way of letting her know? Oh, how selfish love was! She had had no business to upset Venetia like that by frightening her about the future. And then recurred that eternal self-reproach for her attitude toward Murdo during his last days on Roon. His last days! This would have been such a morning for woodcock, and if Murdo were here perhaps Father would not have been talking all the time of going away after Christmas. It seemed incredible that Murdo was not here on this calm winter morning. At that moment the dogs flushed a cock from one of the wind-shorn thickets of blackthorn on the western cliffs along which Vivien was walking. But Murdo would have missed that bird, she thought, with the low sun dazzling his eyes like this. The picture of her brother's almost tragic despair was so vivid that when a spray of gorse plucked at her sleeve in passing she felt that it was Murdo who had touched her to warn her not to talk and to move quietly, because with any luck he might get a second shot at the wily bird over the brow of the next headland. So sharp was the illusion of his presence that she turned to whistle the dogs to heel as became her. But the bleak logic of death spoke in her brain. The sweet fancy fled. And if now she should hear that something had happened to Dick, now, when in sentence upon sentence written by him to her, by her to him, they had built this tower of love in which they were to dwell for ever? Among all her fears it never for an instant came into Vivien's mind that Dick's failure to write was due to any fatigue in his love for her. She could as easily have imagined herself capable of such a decline. Nothing could ever mar their love within themselves; it was vulnerable only as all mortality is vulnerable to fortune's malice and the indifference of death.

Thus musing on love in this December azury, Vivien followed the path that like a fillet of green silk, so lustrous were the little clover-leaves with trembling dew, was twisted round the brows of these westerly cliffs or sometimes like a slender scarf flung over them. At last she came to a place where the path forked, undulating to the left over the heath of Rosevean, dipping to the right beside a narrow stony watercourse where an immote cascade of moss took

the place of the runnel that in wetter years would have been trickling over it toward the sea. Here she scrambled down on a wide hewn terrace that ran round Rosevean Point, to the shallow soil of whose floor, where it was not encrusted with the silvery-green clubs of peppercrop, asterisks of thrift clung like limpets. Before her spread the dazzling sea out of which Carrackoon rose dark against the sun; behind her was the warm granite of the cliff's face and its polychrome of lichens, eyed and dappled with pale yellows and dragon greens, rinded with old gold, husked with orange, ringed and targeted with black, and shaggy with ashen-grey. Here on this sun-dyed terrace the air drowsed in the midwinter peace save when the long low swell of the Atlantic rollers crashed far down against the bastions of the cliff in a shatter of emeralds and iridescent foam.

"O Carrackoon, how empty you look," she murmured. "How empty, how . . ." she stopped in amazement, for smoke was rising into the air from the chimney of the austere house, a straight and very tenuous wisp, but still most unmistakably smoke.

Vivien turned so quickly and hurried so fast toward home that the six dogs who were exploring the rocky lairs of rabbits in the cliffs did not discover that she had left the terrace until she had nearly reached the pinewood in the swift diagonal she took across the top of the island to reach the tower more quickly.

Venetia was still sitting in downcast contemplation of the map of Europe after the Congress of Vienna.

"Somebody on Carrackoon?" she echoed to her sister's excited announcement. "Who do you think—oh, Vivien, I know who you think it may be, and I'm sure it is! Oh, do let's row over and see! Oh, darling, I do love you so frightfully! Let's go now. Don't let's wait another moment. Oh, my gosh, I'm all over the moon."

"Don't you think we had better wait till after lunch?"

"Ah no, Vivien, all the sweet of the day will be gone by then."

"Yes, but—but if it is Dick, though I don't think it's in the least likely to be Dick . . ."

"Oh yes, you do, Vivien, you fraud. You know you do. Your heart's saying 'Dick, Dick, Dick,' as fast as a watch. And your cheeks are all rose-red. I wish I could blush like you, but I turn kind of magenta."

"Yes, but if it is Dick," said Vivien, "and Father knows we went over to Carrackoon, he'll be rather angry when he finds out."

"Well, let him be angry. You've got to take a firm stand some time," Venetia superbly proclaimed. "You've got to cross the

Rubicund some time—oh no, Vivien, don't laugh! I know I've said it wrong. What is it?"

So, in the end the girls left word with Susan to tell the Knight they were going out in the boat on this fine day and would take their lunch with them. It was within an hour of high water, so that they were able to embark at the pier in their dinghy, for calm though the sea was on this side of the island there would be a swell running through the strait between Roon and Carrackoon that might be more than the cockle would relish.

"What idiots we both are!" Vivien exclaimed suddenly. "After all, why should it be Dick?"

"Well, even if it isn't, it's glorious on the sea to-day," said Venetia. "And look, Vivien, look, there's a kingfisher flying toward Carrackoon!"

The girls stopped rowing and turned to follow the jewelled flight of the blue bird across the blue water.

"I was reading about Alcyone in Lemprière the other day," said Venetia.

"I said you weren't to read Lemprière, and I gave you Smith's Smaller Classical Dictionary, which is all you want to know that it's Rubicon not Rubicund."

"Now, look here, Vivien," said her small sister firmly. "I want you to understand once for all that I'm going to read what I like in future. You must have read Lemprière yourself, or you wouldn't have told me not to read it. You see, you've got to face the awkward fact, darling, that I'm your chaperon nowadays, and I suppose you'll admit that chaperons can read what they like. So, I don't think we'll argue about Lemprière any more, or else I shall have to forbid *you* to read one or two books."

Vivien could not help acknowledging that Venetia had a good deal of reason for her attitude. Besides, she thought, looking fondly at the red-brown hair tumbling over the back and shoulders that were pulling such a steady stroke, what harm could Venetia take from any book?

"I haven't seen a kingfisher for ages," she was grunting, as the boat flew on. "I think it means good luck."

Presently they were swinging past Carrackoon on the flowing tide.

"If it was Dick he'd have been here to meet us," said Vivien sadly.

"Well, there's somebody here anyway," said Venetia, pointing to a small boat lying on its side at the head of the steep grey beach.

"Let's land in the cove beyond the house. There won't be such a run of tide there."

So they swirled past the tongue of land above which the austere house looked down at them without any sign of life, for even the chimney was no longer smoking, and had it not been for that boat Vivien would have come to the conclusion that the presence of somebody on Carrackoon was a mirage of her heart's desire. They landed easily in the little cove and left the dinghy moored to an iron ring in the adjacent rocks. Then they scrambled up the crescent of low cliffs under the overarching boughs of the pear-trees and elms, clutching for support at the clumps of iris flags until the grey pebbles of the beach below were speckled with the lucid scarlet seeds shaken from the burst pods. At the top they vaulted the low wall that bounded on this side the green close of the ruined house. Here the grass unwarmed by the sun, which at this season of the year hardly cleared the top of the steep wooded hillside by noon, was still netted with the silver of the night. The shadowed quiet of this place made them talk in whispers about the next move. To mount those dark steps under the ilex and invade the garden behind the ruin was beginning to seem rather too much of an adventure.

"Let's go back," Vivien suggested in a sudden panic. "There's nobody here."

"Of course there's nobody *here*," said Venetia. "You wouldn't expect to find Dick in the ruin. He'll be indoors in the house. I'll call him."

"No, no," Vivien begged. "Suppose it were the old German come back?"

"Well, he used to be a friend of ours," said Venetia.

"But he won't be now," said Vivien. "He must hate all English people now after the way they treated him when war was declared."

"Come on, Vivien," Venetia urged. "Don't be such a funk."

She led the way boldly up the steps and through the wicket on the right into the upper terrace of the garden where the weedy ground was strewn with medlars and sodden leaves. Thence they passed down through another small wicket into the lower enclosure, from which half-a-dozen cock bullfinches flew up into the wood, seeming vivid as parroquets among the grey and glaucous trunks. The under branches of the great mulberry-tree still kept a few of its yellow leaves, and all the ground beneath was studded with crocuses of delicate hues of mauve and lavender, their petals feathered and veined with darker violet, their stamens like tongues of flame.

"I never remember seeing crocuses here before," said Vivien. "I should have thought the rabbits would have eaten them long ago."

"I don't remember them either," said Venetia. "Perhaps Dick planted them. I know he did plant some bulbs. Oh, Vivien, look, the smoke's coming out in clouds now. So there is somebody there. And the garden-door is wide open."

She ran ahead to go through and peep in at the window of the house.

"Vivien," she came back to call. "Come quickly, come quickly! It's a black man. Come quickly and look." Then she screamed and leapt down the steps into the garden. "Ouch! He's coming after us. Let's bunk!"

But at that moment the black man appeared in the doorway.

"Vivien! Venetia!"

And it was Dick after all.

"What *have* you been doing?" the girls exclaimed.

"Trying to light the fire. I was waiting till the tide went down a bit. There was such a run on the beach, I couldn't launch the dinghy. I was coming over to surprise you later. What *are* you both laughing at?"

"You're quite black, Dick!" they told him.

"Oh lord, am I? It's that fire, I suppose. There was an old nest or something. I've had a terrific struggle with it, but it's going well now. I've got some water. I'll go and wash."

He vanished.

"I think I'd better go and see that the dinghy's all right," said Venetia, looking shrewdly at her sister.

"No, no wait till Dick comes back," Vivien urged nervously.

"Don't be so silly," said Venetia, breaking away from her sister's detaining arm. "You won't feel a bit shy when you see him with a clean face."

"Venetia, please!"

"I'll come back presently and bring up our lunch."

"He'll wonder what you're doing," said Vivien.

"Oh no, he won't," Venetia called back over her shoulder, as at the top of her speed she ran out of the garden and vanished round the side of the ruined house.

Every day and night since Dick and she were separated, Vivien had been conjuring to her mind's eye so many different pictures of how and when and where they should meet again; but she had never pictured herself waiting here by these winter crocuses while he was

washing soot from his face. Nor somehow had she ever imagined that she should feel so shy as this—so shy that really she could not wait here a moment longer. She turned and walked back across the garden to the upper terrace; but just as she had opened the second wicket and reached the long flight of steps, he overtook her.

"Vivien!"

He was holding her close on that very flagstone where fourteen months ago she had pitched away the lilies at the sound of her little sister's voice calling from the Tol.

"Vivien, at last!"

And all those crackling letters she treasured in her tower flamed in that one kiss.

"Call me what you could write," he murmured.

Her crimson cheeks were buried deep in his shoulder, but leaning down he heard her sigh:

"My dearest."

"Vivien, you are a thousand times more wonderful than even I dreamed."

"Only to you," she said, looking up with shining eyes. "To no one else but you, my dear."

"Does anybody else matter?"

And for answer to that sublime egoism of youth and love she laid a white hand on his shoulder.

He kissed her finger-tips.

"It may sound a ridiculous thing to say, but when you put your fingers on my shoulder I feel as if I were singing like a violin."

She drew him closer in a shy caress.

"How I have dreamed of your hair against my cheek like this," he sighed. "Sometimes I used to long for a photograph of you. But I was foolish. That mist of pale rose and gold which was you for ever in my vision was much more you than any photograph with eyes that had never looked at me. Ah, my Vivien, say that you love me as much as you did when I went away."

"I love you more—much more."

"Heart of my heart, there are tears in your eyes."

"Only because I'm so happy, my dearest."

He kissed quickly those dewy lids, and the quiver of their lashes against his lips thrilled him more poignantly with the wonder of her preciousness. Not by the beating of her heart against his own, nor by her breast's swift rise and fall, nor by the slimness of her form in that soft jersey of powdered blue, nor by the fragility of her

yielding waist, nor by her cheeks' fire, nor even by the stirred carnation of her mouth was he made as exquisitely and almost fearfully aware of this treasure he had gathered for his own as by those lashes that quivered beneath his kiss like the wings of her girlhood taking flight.

And standing thus in a tranced silence they heard the thunder of the Atlantic on the far side of Carrackoon like the noise of life.

"We have so much to do before we can be married," he sighed.

"But the war is over, and oh, thank God, my dearest, you are safe. It's such a joy to see you in that old tweed coat."

"Even with a black face?"

She laughed.

"Oh, Dick, wasn't it absurd? I've thought of a thousand ways of meeting you for the first time again, but never never did I think I'd see you standing in the door of this garden looking exactly like a disconcerted goliwog. Oh, Dick, isn't it glorious to be standing here and able to laugh together at something?"

A quarter of an hour later, with Venetia added to their jollity, they were all laughing more than ever over Dick's attempts to arrange his house.

"I had this brilliant idea of camping out here," he explained. "But I was afraid that Penfold wouldn't give me permission. So, I didn't want to say anything beforehand, and in any case I wasn't quite sure when I should be able to get away. There's been rather a run on leave since the Armistice. But I got my week at last, and here I am. Penfold was awfully decent."

"He's rather a friend of mine," said Vivien.

"And of mine too, Vivien," Venetia insisted.

"Yes he said 'Give my love to the girls,'" Dick told them.

"Dear Penny! I'm sure he'd be frightfully sympathetic if he knew about you and Vivien. We always think that he's had an unhappy love-affair, don't we, Vivien?"

"I asked him if there was any likelihood of Carrackoon's coming into the market soon," Dick went on. "But he didn't think there was. 'My dear fellow, we've got to clear up the mess made by you military people before we think about anything else,' he said. I asked him to let me know in good time before it was going to be let. Of course, if Sir Morgan wants it . . ."

"Oh, no, of course Father can't have it," Venetia interrupted. "He only wants it because they won't let him have it. How long are you going to stay, Dick?"

"Only a week. But I shall get out of the Army as soon as I can. And then as soon as I have talked things over with my trustees I shall go and work in a nursery for a while. I've quite made up my mind to go in for growing flowers. By the way, did you notice my crocuses? If I can't get hold of Carrackoon, I shall rent a place on the south coast of Lyonesse. I'm sure the trustees will let me invest a certain amount of capital. It seems rather ridiculous that I shouldn't have complete control of my own money till I'm thirty, but my father was slightly extravagant in his youth and made up his mind to be wise on my behalf."

"How much money have you got, Dick?" Venetia asked.

"A little bit over ten thousand pounds."

"But, my dear lad, you're rich," she exclaimed. "Vivien and I thought you were quite poor. What a swizzel!"

Dick laughed.

"I hope your father will be as much impressed by my wealth as you are," he laughed.

The future began to seem so easy when it was talked over like this round a picnic lunch, and before the last hard-boiled egg was eaten Dick was calculating how much he should be making with his daffodils and tulips in the spring of 1920.

"My idea was to get this house done up and furnish it gradually," he enlarged. "All I want for myself is this canvas bed and camp outfit. As far as I'm concerned the house is furnished now."

"But you haven't even got a table," Venetia protested. "Unless you call this broken garden seat a table."

"Ah, yes, of course, there'll be one or two things perhaps such as a table and a chair or two," Dick admitted. "But my point is that if I furnish gradually I need only get jolly things. For instance, I saw a perfectly splendid old figure-head of Neptune in a second-hand shop in Penzance yesterday. Absurdly cheap. Four pounds! Now wouldn't that look delightful down at the landing-place?"

"Talking of landing-places," said Vivien, "you ought to have learnt by now that the place to land after half-water on Carrackoon when there's a sou'-west swell is down below the ruin."

"Yes, I'll remember that," said Dick. "As a matter of fact the old boy who brought me over wanted to put me ashore there this morning when it was dead low water. Still, if I'd come over to Roon you wouldn't have come over here, and we should have missed this marvellous lunch."

After lunch they walked round to the south of the island and sat in the sun until Vivien thought it was time she and Venetia were going home.

"Oh, Vivien, there's no need for us to go back yet," said Venetia. "I'll go and get the dinghy round to the other beach before it dries between Merg and Carrackoon. There won't be any run of sea now. You need not come for another hour at least."

When Venetia was gone, Dick turned to Vivien.

"The little wood?" he whispered.

And her sea-blue eyes glowed "yes."

Within the wood the patches of moss gleamed like great chrysolites athwart the winter sun; and among the scattered chestnut husks the primrose leaves were pushing up through the earth.

"It is Spring already here," he vowed. "Ah, my sweet, that April afternoon, and you and I! How tempting it is to vow that no lovers ever loved as we love! And, Vivien, is it so absurd?"

"There's something frightening about a fine day in December," she said. "Don't you think so, Dick? If it were May we could imagine that there would be no storms all Summer through, but we know that this cannot last. We know that we must live through so many weeks of wind and rain."

"This is a day stolen from time for you and me," he said. "It may be only a dream, but at any rate you and I are both dreaming it."

She looked at him as if she would assay his reality.

"I feel as if we had been shut up in a crystal globe and that presently a hammer will crash down upon it. Dick, I'm frightened. Last time we left this wood, we saw that destroyer, don't you remember? What shall we see this time?"

"Only the pale blue sea between Roon and Carrackoon," he assured her.

"Ever since the shock of Murdo's death I never seem able to feel secure."

Dick put his arm round her.

"My darling, it must have been too ghastly for you. I must appear such a self-absorbed brute. Forgive me."

"And I used to watch the *Mermaid* crawling back from Penzawn, wondering if I was going to lose you as well. And, Dick, my dear, the death of that little brother of mine has made it much more difficult for you and me. Murdo would have helped us with Father. It's going to be terribly difficult with Father now."

"I ought to speak to him at once. The sooner the better. He might resent it very much if he heard that I was here and found out that you had been over to see me."

"He's in no mood to be spoken to at present," she warned him.

"Still, I'll have to do it now," he insisted. "It's the only decent thing to do. I've no right to assume that the future of his daughter depends on a mood. I think we should weaken our position if we let him suppose we thought we were in the wrong. Why not beard him in a bad mood? We shall have got over the worst then. If we waited till he's in a good mood and then he refused to accept me, we should have nothing for it but open defiance."

"He'll never consent to our being engaged at present," Vivien said gloomily. "Never."

"And what will you do if he says 'no'?"

"Well, I suppose I'll wait till I'm twenty-one and then—but oh, Dick, there's Venetia. I couldn't elope and leave her alone with Father. I couldn't possibly."

"Of course not," he agreed. "But you wouldn't give me up? You wouldn't even pretend to give me up?"

"I don't think I could give you up if I tried."

"Well, then, I shall come over to-morrow and speak to your father. If he refuses and forbids us to see each other, we shall have to decide on our own attitude. We can't expect that a great love like ours is going to move along like a tram. Anyway, the war's over, and that's the first fence passed."

"It is really over? It can't begin again?" she asked apprehensively. He shook his head.

"Not possibly. None of us has any will to fight any more. We're all winded morally—except the Americans. But it's unfair to sneer at them. It's like sneering at freshmen for smoking big pipes and wearing bright waistcoats and being keen on getting blues. We've all done the same."

She turned to him.

"I love you so."

"Vivien! Vivien!"

They stood in the wintry peace imparadised within each other's arms, motionless as the unvexed trees around them, silent as the sheen of moss beneath their feet. Then without words for the timeless wonder of that embrace, they left the little wood to walk on the top of the island, nay rather to walk on the top of this green world in that clarity of azurous air; and their souls expanded in a mighty

and heroic calm so that their shadows very long in the low sunlight seemed to be the true reflections of their greater selves. They walked serenely—lord and lady of space, king and queen of time, but of love the humble thralls.

Yet already the halcyon must look to her sea-borne nest. Where hardly ten minutes ago the limpid sky had melted in the silver of the western ocean a long ingot of lead now rested on the sharp and sombre rim of that horizon. Even overhead the turquoise was partially hidden by a matrix of ragged grey clouds; and on the shore the swell was breaking more often and more loudly.

"I thought this weather was too fine to last," Vivien sighed. "We're going to have another sou'-wester. Dick, don't take any risks by trying to cross over to-morrow if it's blowing hard. Promise me you won't."

"But it will be too infernal if I can't see you," he exclaimed in consternation. "Do you think it's going to blow so hard as all that?"

"Dick, you won't try to cross if it's rough? You must promise me that. I shall be in an agony all day if I think you're likely to be foolish."

"But at dead low water . . ." he began.

"No, no, Dick. Now, please, you must promise me."

"It may blow the whole week I'm here," he groaned. "Still, if it will worry you, I promise I won't try to cross."

That night Dick woke to hear the wind booming round the house; and when he looked out of the windows in the drear light of the December morning he saw that the sea was lashed white between the two islands. A flock of wild grey geese feeding on the sands rose and, beaten by the wind, swept through the driving spray toward the mainland. If the fire smoked yesterday afternoon, this morning it smoked ten times as badly. It seemed as if the very storm-clouds had forced their way down the chimney and were belching forth their spite into the dark pitchpine room. The gale rose all the morning with the rising tide. At high water Merg through the flying spume appeared like a mountain-top in a blizzard. The house was in tremors.

"Perhaps the wind will drop with the ebb," he thought.

But it blew harder than ever; and in the waning light of the afternoon the black shadow of Roon was as far away as Paradise.

22

THE SUITOR

The gale blew from the south-west with undiminished fury for another two days and nights, and even on the fourth day after his arrival the sea was still too high for Dick to cross over to Roon. Yet, such was the magic of Carrackoon for him, there was never a moment when he felt inclined to reconsider the joy of living on a small island, although to have the core of his leave ruthlessly cut out like this might have exasperated the most perfectly predisposed hermit. He spent the daylight in making a really thorough exploration of the island, the lamplight in reading the two great volumes of Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*, and in rehearsing over and over again that impending interview with Sir Morgan Romare.

Vivien and Venetia debated the prudence of telling their father that they had seen Dick; but when he gave no sign of having heard anything of his presence on Carrackoon they decided to hold their tongues. The fierce weather made them glad that they had done so, for it seemed to both of them that, with time to prepare for Dick's visit, their father would probably have worked himself up into one of his obdurate humours by the time he arrived.

It was a Monday morning when the sea was calm enough for Dick to cross, and the two girls were out on Rosevean by ten o'clock to watch his boat. The tide being low, Dick pulled in to the steps where they met him.

"I think I'll go straight up to the House and ask to see your father," he said anxiously. "I suppose he won't refuse to receive me?"

"Oh, he's sure to see you," Vivien said. "We've not told him anything about your being here, because we were rather afraid he might give orders you were not to be allowed to land. Hurry up now, and don't go to the House door. He'll be in the library, because he has about four days' post to get through. Go round by the chapel and knock at the outside door of the library. Venetia and I will wait on Rosevean. Oh, Dick, I do hope Father will be kind to you."

"I feel horribly nervous," he admitted. "Quite choky, in fact."

"Poor dear!"

"You'll probably find Father buried under newspapers," Venetia put in. "He gets so angry with them when they all arrive in a bunch like this."

He set off toward Romare's House, humming to himself.

"I say," Venetia exclaimed in consternation, "I hope he won't hum when he meets Father. I'd better run after him and warn him not to, hadn't I?"

"Thanks very much," said Dick, when he had been overtaken and warned about his demeanour. "Though I didn't really know I was humming."

"Well, if you simply can't help humming, Dick, for goodness' sake don't hum the *Dead March in Saul*."

"I wasn't," he said indignantly. "If I was humming anything, it was *The Long, Long Trail*."

Venetia looked incredulous.

"I think Father might think it was the other," she said. "So try not to hum at all. That'll be best."

On his way up the drive Dick met Sam Hockin and Rawlins the carpenter, both of whom seemed pleased to see him again, which restored a little of his confidence. It had all oozed away again, however, by the time he had entered the shadow of the tall pines at the top; and he paused by the gate of the walled-in kitchen-garden that extended in terraces down the slope of the hill in front of Romare's House. He felt that a cheerful greeting, this time from one of the gardeners, might give his courage another fillip. But nobody was working in the kitchen-garden on this dank raw grey day. The sea round the island was staring like a fish's eye. Romare's House appeared very grim. The armed mermen on the pillars, scaled with green damp, added a threat of their own to the creaking of the wrought-iron gate at the touch of the intruder's hand. The flat windows of the Georgian façade looked discouragingly proprietary, like ancient female servitors with their valances and looped-up curtains. The absence of any path across the lawn lent an air of insolence to Dick's approach. The dozen starlings that were searching methodically for grubs and daring to pock the smooth turf with their beaks paid no attention to him, but an hysterical blackbird flew off over the high garden wall with such a shrilling that he expected to see heads appear at every window to find out who the trespasser was. He wished that instead of taking Vivien's advice he had gone round to the other side of the House and inquired for the Knight properly. But if he turned back now

and somebody should see him, it would be more embarrassing than ever. And here, most formidable of all, was the outer door of the library with its great floriated hinges and twisted iron handle.

Dick tapped with the kind of desperation that a man may use to pull the trigger of a pistol turned against his own temple.

"Come in."

He entered the sombrous room where on this drear day the beryl-green casements were dark as bottle-glass.

The Knight was seated by a fire of logs in a deep leather arm-chair which, among the beautiful pieces of antiquity that surrounded it, looked as uncouth and gross as a fat hog. As Venetia had foretold he was engaged in trying to catch up with the heap of newspapers that had accumulated in Penzawn during the stormy weather.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded, not recognizing Dick in his tweeds. "What? The fellow who was in command of the garrison? Have you come over to settle for the damage done to my cottage by the military? Sit down."

Dick hastily took advantage of the invitation before he explained that his mission had nothing whatever to do with the military. He rather wished that there had been another deep leather arm-chair handy, for he felt uncommonly like a Jack-in-the-box sitting on the straight-backed Gothic chair he had chosen. The wooden seat gave him the impression that his tenure of it was insecure. He was convinced that if the Knight became angry he should jump up in a panic and never be invited to sit down again in Romare's House.

"I'm sorry to hear that the cottages were damaged after I left," he began. "But I'm afraid I haven't come over to Roon about them, Sir Morgan. I had . . . er . . . I had a few days' leave and I enjoyed myself so much here . . . I mean to say I enjoyed being on Roon so much . . . that I thought I'd like to . . . to call and . . . and see you . . . and . . ."

"Very kind of you," the Knight interposed drily. "Did you come over in my boat to pay me this very flattering visit?"

"No . . . oh no . . . I'm actually staying on Carrackoon just now."

The Knight frowned.

"For long?" he asked coldly.

"No, I have to rejoin my battalion in a day or two, that is of course until I'm demobilized."

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you, Mr.—Mr.—let me see, I'm afraid I've forgotten your name . . ."

"Deverell."

"Ah, yes, much obliged to you, Mr.—or are you Captain Deverell? The other gentleman who took his warlike recreation on my island attached a great deal of importance to being a Captain, I remember. Possibly you are equally *exigeant* with regard to the niceties of rank and the correct address due to it?"

"Well, as a matter of fact I *was* promoted this summer," said Dick, "but it is a matter of complete indifference to me whether I am a private or a field-marshal. I have no interest in my military status."

"You surprise me, Captain Deverell. In these days when, as Scarron says, *tout le monde se marquise de soimême*, or in other words . . ."

"I understand French," Dick interrupted quickly, and could have bitten out his tongue for the opportunity he thereby gave the Knight to raise his brindled eyebrows.

"I congratulate you," said Sir Morgan. "You are evidently one of those fortunate people who have profited by the war. We have our intellectual profiteers, Captain Deverell, just as we have the other more obvious variety. However, I mustn't keep you here listening to my dull chatter. No doubt, you are anxious to be getting back, and to be quite frank I am rather busy myself this morning." He indicated the pile of unopened papers. "The world has been busy making a fool of itself these last stormy days, and I have to catch up with its folly."

Dick braced himself for the plunge.

"I have come to speak to you, Sir Morgan, about . . ."

He suddenly realized that in all his rehearsals of this scene he had never rehearsed the way he should refer to Vivien. He stammered, hesitating between Miss Romare and Vivien, and in the end compromised. "To speak about your daughter."

"My daughter?" the Knight repeated, and the sound of his voice was as if an icicle had cracked and fallen with a dry tinkle upon the floor of this sombrous room.

There was a long silence which Dick lacked the audacity to break. Nor did he dare to face her father's expression, but sat staring up at the blazoned lattices that lighted the carrols off the ambulatory, staring up at the golden mermaid's averted head, at the galloping chevalier on his green horse, and the mermen in sea-green armour

that brandished their silver scimitars. Should he ever sit in one of those book-lined recesses and turn the pages of some black-letter chronicle with Vivien at his side?

"Might I venture to inquire, Captain Deverell, what possible topic of conversation my daughter can afford you?"

"Well, I want to marry her," Dick blurted out, grasping as he spoke the two finials at the end of the arms of his chair to prevent himself jumping up and hurrying outside to wait on the lawn for the Knight's answer to his suit.

"Have you inquired yet how my daughter regards this ambition?"

Whether the tone of her father's voice made him fearful on Vivien's account, or whether he felt that an affirmative would hopelessly prejudice his chances, or whether (which is most probable) he simply lost his head, at any rate Dick lied.

Sir Morgan nodded slowly to himself as if he were browsing upon the young man's denial.

"In that case," he said at last, "let me strongly recommend you to preserve this highly laudable discretion, for I assume you realize that in no circumstances whatever would I dream of giving my consent. You are not a Catholic?"

"No, sir, but . . ."

"Precisely. So let us look no further for an insuperable objection to marriage with my daughter. I have really no desire to be unnecessarily offensive in declining your offer, and if you will agree to accept my refusal on religious grounds the subject may be dropped without any more discussion."

"But surely mixed marriages are not unheard of?" Dick rashly argued.

"Please, Captain Deverell," said the Knight, raising a long white hand, so like and so unlike Vivien's. "I have offered you a pleasant gentlemanly way of escaping from an awkward situation. Must we prolong this idle discussion? I appreciate very much your consideration in speaking to me first . . ."

Dick winced.

"And I have made clear to you the impossibility of such a match by providing you with a reason that nobody need blame himself for having to accept."

"I had hoped you would let me explain my financial position, and tell you something about myself."

"Captain Deverell," said the Knight, "let me assure you once and for all that no amount of explanation will have the least weight

with me. I have given you my answer. I dislike arguments above all things, and I have what amounts to a horror of pertinacity."

He rose from his chair.

"Let me open the door for you. The handle is rather stiff."

The Knight paused and looked at Dick from eyes so like and so unlike his daughter's.

"Did my butler direct you to the library this way?"

Dick was involved in another lie.

"No, sir, I was told by one of your men that you were in the library, and as I wanted to see you I ventured to come this way. I thought you might be 'not at home,' if I sent in my name."

"It is difficult on an island," said Sir Morgan drily. "One is always a little at the mercy of determined visitors."

Dick blushed with mortification, as he shook her father's limp hand.

"Good-bye, Captain Deverell, I don't suppose you are likely to be down this way again for some time and . . ." the Knight broke off . . . "but of course I can rely on you not to make us all feel uncomfortable."

"By coming to Roon?"

"Precisely. And I'm delighted to find that you feel as I should feel were I in your place. Good-bye, good-bye."

The door of the library closed behind the discomfited suitor.

"Well?" the girls cried when he rejoined them at Rosevean.

Dick groaned.

"I've made the most appalling hash of it."

He related what had happened in the library.

"Oh, you ass! Oh, Dick, you really are a blighted fathead," Venetia exclaimed when he said that he had lied to Sir Morgan over Vivien's knowing.

"Yes, I felt I'd made a hopeless mistake as soon as I said 'no,' " he admitted miserably. "And yet perhaps it's all for the best. Your father can't say anything to Vivien now. He has practically forbidden me the island."

"Yes, but, Dick," Venetia went on, "what *was* the point of saying anything to Father at present unless you got it well into his head that you and Vivien were wildly in love with each other? I can't help it, but, Dick, I do really think you are a most holy ass."

Vivien had not spoken, and he turned to her.

"Shall I go back and tell your father that I lied to him?"

She shook her head.

"No, I think we must leave things as they are for the present," she said. "But I'm wondering what I shall say if he asks me if I knew anything. You see, you had only to pretend that I wasn't in love with you, Dick. But I should have to lie about my love for you, and that's a lie I don't think I *could* tell."

"If I go on making a fool of myself like this," Dick groaned, "I should think you soon wouldn't love me, Venetia, I *am* a holy ass. I lost my head. I never foresaw what this would involve. But perhaps he won't say anything to Vivien."

"I wouldn't bet on it," Venetia said. "He's jolly cunning in his own way, is darling Father. So I advise you to settle what you are going to say, Vivien, if he does ask you."

"I've settled," Vivien declared. "If he asks me I shall say that I am in love with Dick, but that he doesn't know I am. That will put us all square."

"Oh, Vivien, how clever you are! My dear, I think you're a genius," Venetia cried, clapping her hands.

Even Dick cheered up at this solution.

"It's a good thing we let you into the secret of Blood Cave," Venetia babbled on, "which is going to be jolly useful in future. Vivien and I had better get back up to the House as quickly as possible now, but you can have your first tryst there this afternoon." She pronounced it 'triced,' and was indignant when they laughed.

"Well, there are lots of words you see and never hear," she protested. "Though I might have known it would rhyme with 'kissed.'"

So Vivien and Dick parted for three hours, as each thought, but it was much longer than that before they met again.

23

ROMARE'S WATCHMEN

The Knight said nothing to his daughters about the visit he had received. He was for him in these days unusually cheerful at lunch that morning.

"I shall take you girls with me when I go abroad," he announced. "I was reading in the paper this morning that preparations are being made on the Riviera for a great rush of visitors after Christmas."

Vivien and Venetia looked at each other across the dining-table. The last thing either of them wanted was a tour on the continent. They were not growing tired of the seclusion of Roon. These years of the war had endeared the island to them more deeply than ever.

"It will be a capital opportunity for you both to correct your French and Italian pronunciation," the Knight went on. "Besides, you ought to see something of the world. I'm afraid your horizon is becoming very limited. By the way, though I don't suppose you'll understand the importance of it, I have finally succeeded in perfecting my system. It would interest you if either of you had a grain of mathematical ability. I must wait till Tom Bell comes back. He's the only person on Roon who will appreciate the niceties of this system I have been working on. Which reminds me. I had a letter from him this morning, and he writes hopefully of being demobilized very soon after Christmas. We'll be off as soon as he gets back. I hope he won't take himself too seriously as a lieutenant."

"He probably will," said Vivien. "He's never yet taken himself anything but very seriously. He'll probably be quite intolerable."

She took a certain amount of pleasure in sneering at Tom Bell's commission. There was much of the old Knight in his elder daughter.

"You two girls don't seem much elated by the prospect of going abroad. What extraordinary creatures you are! Most girls would be off their heads with excitement," said their father with a hint of petulance.

"Yes, Father dear," Venetia agreed. "But we rather pride ourselves on being different to most girls. We hate most girls."

"You'll both turn into a pair of damned little prigs before you've done," the Knight declared.

Vivien kicked her sister under the table. The present state of affairs demanded tact.

"I expect we shall enjoy it when we go," she said. "But we shall have to get a good many new clothes."

"Of course you'll get plenty of clothes," said the Knight testily. "You don't suppose I want to drag a couple of over-patched scarecrows with me round Europe, do you?"

When lunch was over Vivien took the opportunity of warning Venetia not to say any more against the proposed visit abroad.

"He'll only imagine that we have some special reason for wanting to stay on Roon," she urged.

"Well, so we have," Venetia replied. "And I think you're jolly silly to let Father get in the habit of thinking you're so meek and mild. He just assumes we'll do whatever he says. I've forgiven him for hitting me that day, but I jolly well haven't forgotten he did. You wait till I get a young man, my girl! There won't be any arguments with Father about it, if I have to swim over to Penzawn and be married in a bathing-dress."

"Anyway Dick won't be on Carrackoon this Winter," Vivien pointed out.

"Dick isn't everything. What about Cerberus? Still, if you want me to pretend we shall enjoy ourselves abroad, I suppose I'd better. Are you going to Blood Cave now?"

Vivien smiled at her young sister; but when she was halfway down the stairs she met her father coming up. The Knight had never been inside the tower since the death of his son, and Vivien's immediate thought was that he had found out something about herself and Dick and that there was going to be a scene between them. She had looked back involuntarily over her shoulder as if to summon the aid of Venetia when her father burst into excited chat.

"Ah, I'm glad you've got your things on. Where's Venetia? I want you both to come along with me to the towans. Holt has just been in to say that this last sou'-wester has swept the sand away from the Watchmen and that a great flat stone has been uncovered, which he wants me to look at. He declares that the Watchmen are actually standing up over twenty feet high where the sand has been swept away round their base."

In her worry at not being able to keep her tryst with Dick, Vivien hardly took in the significance of what her father was telling her, and it was not until she was standing like a pygmy at the foot of those now titanic stones that a dread fell upon her of this portent.

"You see, Sir Morgan, they cut through all the grass and scraped around, and once the sand begun to shift it has shifted fast enough to cover a church," Holt was chattering on while the Knight stood silently contemplating the slab. "I han't been near the towans for fowr days, but just before dinner-time Ernie come in and said one of the pigs was missing from Tor Field, and so after dinner I went

down to see if I could find where he was gone to. I walked up to the top of Big Tor and looked if I could spy him anywheres around. 'Hullo,' I said, 'what's happened then by the north beach?' I'm bothered if it didn't give I a proper turn when I see the Watchmen standing up twice so tall as ever I see them in my life. My goodness, if my cap didn't nearly fall off my head, the way my hair was standing up too, and I felt as if I'd swallowed a cold flat-iron. It took I a few minutes to pick up heart to walk over and see what ever had come about. I never felt so froughtened but once before on Roon which was when I were out snaring one January night fifty years ago and the old elder-tree that grew on Penmarrack bowed low to the ground before my eyes and not a breath of wind blowing, but a sprinkle of frost in the air and the full moon so bright as day. That skeered I proper, but I was nigh so skeered this afternoon when I see the Watchmen reaching up like Jacob's Ladder. But I walked on across the towans in the martel quiet wi' my heart blundering along like a gadded carthorse, and when I see the Watchmen staring down at me and this flat stone all uncovered I turned around and come back to fetch you, Sir Morgan."

"Quite right, Holt," said the Knight. "The question is how shall we raise it?"

"Raise it?" Vivien echoed in affright.

She had been listening to the old man's voice, forgetful even of her broken tryst with Dick. The motionless atmosphere; the unbroken grey of the incumbent sky; the high fantastic zigzag of sandy peaks into which the wind had blown the barrier between the shore and the land; the stale froth like fungus along the beach; the dark and dislusted mirror of the sea; the haggard Garms standing out cadaverous beyond; and those seven monstrous stones clothed above with a harlequin coat of lichens, but naked as picked bones where the gale had stripped them below—all this heaviness of earth and air and ocean seemed to be pressing down upon the uncovered slab as if they would forbid the ravishment of its secret.

"Of course we'll raise it," her father was declaring. "But we shall want tools. Run back to the farm, Venetia, and fetch two or three of the men with picks and crowbars."

Vivien realized by Venetia's bright excited eyes that she could expect no help from her in dissuading their father from his project; and she watched her running back by the edge of the sandy track, with only one hope left—that no crowbar would avail to raise the slab.

"By gad, I forgot to tell her we shall want ropes as well," the Knight exclaimed. "You'd better go back too, Holt. Bring all the men. This is going to be a stiff job."

Vivien wondered if her father would take this opportunity to ask about Dick. He would have the truth here, for in the presence of the Seven Watchmen she should be incapable of lying to him about her love. She need not have concerned herself. The Knight had completely forgotten about the presumptuous young man who had intruded upon him this morning.

"It would be very odd if we did find anything of value underneath," he said. "But we may, you know. We may."

Although Vivien had never seen her father at the tables, she divined that the light in his eyes were the greedy light in the eyes of a gambler who waits to watch the turn of a card. He would look thus at Monte Carlo, she thought shamefully. She felt that she had surprised him in a disgrace.

"It's very puzzling," he continued. "But it all goes to prove my theory that the whole level of Roon was within comparatively recent times much higher, and that the sand of the towans merely overlays good solid ground. Nobody would ever have constructed a dolmen or cromlech as important as this in shifting sands. I dare say there was once a complete circle of menhirs here."

So he went on theorizing, for all the world like a Bickerstaff Vivien thought contemptuously. She made one more effort to deter him from gratifying his curiosity when she saw beyond Big Tor the file of men winding down the road to the towans.

"Suppose this is the treasure of fairy gold?" she asked.

The Knight laughed.

"My dear girl, I wish it were!"

"But you wouldn't—you wouldn't take it?" she stammered. "It would mean the end of us."

"The end of us?" he repeated with a bitter laugh. "We have taken no gold from Roon, but Murdo was taken from us. The end is already in sight."

"Oh, if the cromlechs had never been touched!" she lamented.

"Listen, Vivien, I wish to hear no more of this superstitious clap-trap. It was a piece of infernal impudence interfering with them. But to say that opening one of them had anything to do with Murdo's death is no better than blasphemy. So, silence about that, or I'll open the rest of them and plough in the bones for manure."

It was a tremendous effort to lift the great slab, and when at last the cavity beneath was revealed it yawned black in the rapid dusk of the dark winter afternoon just about the time that Dick with a final sigh of despair launched his boat and pulled back across the melancholy sea to Carrackoon.

The Knight, who had worked as hard as any of his men, kneeled down and peered within.

"By gad," he cried triumphantly, "there is something there, I do believe! Give me the rope, I want to see how deep it is."

The rope registered twelve feet at least.

"I can let myself down," he said. "But I'll want a ladder to get myself out again. Two of you men go back as quick as you can and fetch one."

"A-look now, Sir Morgan, be a bit careful," Holt adjured, as the Knight swung his long legs over the edge and prepared to let himself down.

"Father, don't do it," Vivien cried.

"You're jolly brave," Venetia murmured in awed admiration.

"Don't 'ee go down, Sir Morgan dear," Ernie Pascoe begged. "Don't 'ee go for the love of Jamminy. You'm surely pisky led, Sir Morgan."

The Knight laughed at the general dismay, and a few moments later his voice hollow-sounding came up from the darkness beyond the aperture.

"Tell somebody else to go for a candle. It's too dark to see much farther underneath."

A match flared within, lighting the hole most eerily.

"Mr. Holt, Mr. Holt," Ernie was almost blubbering, "I give 'ee fair warning if th' old Devil lays a-hold of Sir Morgan I bean't going to lay a-hold of th' old Devil. So don't 'ee turn on me, Mr. Holt, the same as you did last week when I left go of the old bull's pole."

The Knight's voice sounded again.

"Vivien! Venetia! Come down both of you. It is gold!"

Venetia ran forward excitedly, but her sister pulled her back.

"Darling, please, please, I entreat you not to go down. Please, Venetia. I know this is wrong. I know it, darling, and I beg you not to go."

"Well, I won't," said Venetia in a funny little frightened voice.

The Knight came back from within. Standing below the aperture, he shouted:

"Catch!"

Something spun into the air and fell with a chink upon the overturned slab.

"Do you see what it is?" he shouted. "A sun-disc. If you look at it, you'll see the graven symbol. Irish gold, I fancy. But there's something much more wonderful. I'll show you presently."

It was forty minutes later and pitch-dark when they returned with the ladder and the candles, long before which the Knight had struck all his own matches and all the matches his men had with them in his effort to gather together the treasure within.

When he emerged he was carrying a golden boat holding a golden disc and attached to a golden bird.

"This is the biggest find since the Trundholm chariot," the Knight proclaimed. "Do you see what this is, girls? Do you know the bronze age myth about the sun? By day the sun was drawn by horses in a chariot across the heavens to the place of his setting. By night he was drawn across the ocean by a swan to the place of his rising. Well, they've found his golden chariot, horses, sun, and all; and they've found his golden boat; but they've never found his boat harnessed to the swan and himself inside. And here it is on Roon. Hold this, Vivien, while I go down and gather up the small discs. There must be nearly fifty of them."

Vivien shrank from the swan-drawn boat.

"I'd rather not touch it. Put it back, Father, put it back and cover it up again with the stone. Please, Father. Don't take away this gold. I know it will bring misfortune on us. I know it will. Oh, do listen to me!"

The Knight laughed.

"Misfortune! Why, this boat is priceless. I shall get some thousands for it. It's unique."

"You'll sell it?" Vivien gasped.

"Of course I will, and it will bring me luck. It's exactly what I need to give my system a chance."

Vivien was awake nearly all that night, a prey to the fevers and fancies created by that scene on the towans added to her failure to keep the tryst with Dick. The thought of that golden boat locked up in one of the aumbries of the library made the whole house insecure. It was foolish of her father to mock at the old legend of the sea-prince and his daughter Melusine. Even if one admitted that the actual details might be a fairy tale of long ago, the burial

of the gold was real enough, and they who buried it had buried it in solemn worship of the Sun. They would have buried with the sacred representation a curse on any who profaned the shrine. All that ardour of devotion which had strengthened the arms of the worshippers to raise those mighty stones for guardians of their gold would not yet be extinct. Even as the stones had stood through forty centuries in spite of nature's perpetual war against their stability, so too must the burning impulse that set them up be still strong enough to avenge the sacrilege. The island itself must feel unhallowed by the impious deed. How could her father have committed a deed so utterly against the traditions of Romare? Had he forgotten the law that Roon never allowed even Romare to profit from it, that Roon would give even to Romare nothing except its own charm? Bygone Knights had tried in most unknighly fashion to exploit their island. But Roon had always taken its revenge. What had happened when great-grandfather Murdoch had sunk his shafts for copper and silver? A thousand times more money had been poured down them than was ever taken out. And the granite quarrying of grandfather Morven? Cholera among the quarriers. A fortune wasted. Roon did not want its granite trodden by city folk, thundered over by omnibuses. That granite road to the London Docks must have cried out for revenge. And Roon avenged the spoliation. No Romare had ever been allowed to exploit the island with impunity, and until he understood that he belonged to the island, not the island to him, he was always unfortunate. Roon was jealous too. Roon had not liked the way great-great-grandfather Morolt loved Carrackoon. Roon had taken good care that there should be no rival any more. But this that her own father was doing was by far the worst offence of all. For the copper and silver and stone robbed from it Roon had demanded reparation. What fearful reparation might it not demand for the pillage of the sacred gold?

Vivien tried by lighting a candle to shut out the dripping apparitions which thronged the tower that night. Venetia lay fast asleep; but her brows were knit, and from time to time she clutched at the coverlet as if her dreams were haunted by the outraged spirits of Roon. Vivien looked at her watch. Half-past two. Blackness and silence without. Within the tower only her beating heart, and blackness all around except where that still spearhead of candle-flame transfixed the unnatural quiet of this winter night. No Murdo in the room beneath, no Murdo to run to for protection as she had so

often run to him in the past. Empty for evermore those rooms below. Venetia turned over on her side, whimpering softly like a small puppy-dog outside a closed door.

Vivien lay for an hour watching the candle-flame, watching the dark blue base and the dance of the scintillating atomies of sparks therein, watching the tralucant rim of wax and the steady symmetry of its gradual decline. Then she blew out the flame and tried once more to fall asleep. The whiff of the extinguished wick gave a kind of comfort to the dank air, a warmth as of life to this deadness of the ghastly night. In the imagination of Dick's arms about her she took refuge from the malaise and the menace that oppressed her. Shy though she was when he held her in reality, she was not shy now; but in the darkness she called him all those sweet names she could not even write, clasped him to her breast with kisses wild as the crimson dawn she woke to see pouring through the casement of her room. A low puff of wind moaned for an instant round the tower, and presently another and a stronger gust rattled the hasp of the lattice. The gashes in the eastern sky were quickly stanchd by thick clouds, and on the casements of the school-room there was the rattle of a sharp flaw of rain with whistling of wind under the sills and a low crying in the chimneys.

"More bad weather coming," Vivien sighed. "Perhaps Dick won't be able to get over this morning."

"Presently, however, the squall died away. She could see it now whitening the sea halfway to Penzawn.

At this moment the skipper of the lugger *Anna Maria* dropped anchor off Carrackoon, and sent his mate ashore to tell that young fellow if he wanted to be sure of getting back to Penzawn two days hence he would be wise to come at once.

"I'll make no promise to come again for a week or more," he told Dick when the latter was rowed off to find out what this unexpected arrival of the lugger portended.

"Couldn't you wait till this afternoon?" he pleaded.

"I won't wait not another half-hour, sir," said the skipper firmly. "I wouldn't have come over now if I hadn't promised to be sure you got back Thursday morning without fail; and the only way you can do that is by coming back along with me now. We're in for some more dirty weather. Very dirty weather. I never seed such a dirty prospect."

Dick hesitated. To abandon the islands like this without seeing Vivien again was hardly to be borne. And yet should he overstay

his leave it might postpone his demobilization. Moreover, if the weather turned out as bad as the skipper expected, he should not be able to get over to Roon.

"There's plenty of water in Roon harbour?" he asked.

The skipper assented.

"You could put in there for a minute while I leave a letter?"

The skipper looked at the sky.

"If you're aboard in half an hour, sir."

Dick wrote a brief note to Vivien, begging her to let him know as soon as possible why she had not come yesterday afternoon to the cave and explaining the reason for his own departure. He half hoped that she would see the lugger entering the harbour and guess who it was on board. Unfortunately, while the *Anna Maria* was making Roon, Vivien was hurrying along the top of the island to see if Dick was looking out for a signal on Carrackoon; and by the time she had reached the harbour on the way back the lugger was a mile across the Sound. It was Sam Hocking who gave her Dick's note; and when she read it, with the raindrops blurring the ink like tears and the wind tearing at the flimsy paper, she could not but acknowledge that he had been wise to run no risks. But suppose he should not be able to get free of the Army before she was gone abroad with her father? Still, they had had one perfect afternoon together, the memory of which must enclose within a crystal calm the long fretful months ahead of them. And, as Dick had said, you could not expect true love to move like a tram.

All day the wind increased in fury, blowing full from the west with squall after raging squall, in the brief intervals between which the island stared livid green under a haggard effulgence of tortured sunlight so that when the flying rags of wan blue sky were once again engulfed by the darkness of the next squall it was almost a relief. Dusk descended to the crash of a tremendous thunderclap followed by a frenzied tattoo of hail on the windows and latticed casements of Romare's House. By dinner-time the wind had veered to the north-west and was blowing with hurricane force. A casement in one of the maids' rooms on the north side was shattered, through which the savage gusts burst in to flap and scream down the corridors like a flight of maddened buzzards. And above the shrieking and demoniac piping, above the bedlamite racket and rataplan, above the high tantaras in the chimney-tops, above the steady droning round the outer walls, above the rattled panes and musketry of snapping boughs and swish of tormented ivy, above

the booming of the wind's relentless advance, sometimes in a long roll of oncoming drums, sometimes in salvoes of mighty guns, sounded the roaring monotone of the ocean.

About eleven o'clock Holt came in, his white hair blown up like a cockatoo's crest, to say that the great rick in High Lea was blown to smithereens.

"Fred Carlow and Ernie and me went out to try to peg 'un, but law! you might so well have tried to peg down Bellsbub himself. I never remember such a night on Roon not in all the time I've been here. It didn't blow so hard as this when Bailiff Johnson's wife thought the farmhouse were going to blow away and come running out in her nightdress across the yard and were carried clean through into one of the pigsties; and when she crawled out again the door blew to and it took the better part of her nightdress off and she crawled back along with no more to cover her than a babby's dribbler, and her a very fleshy woman too. Bah! but 'tis wicked to be telling tales when there's ninety tons and more of good hay gone like a handful of dust."

Outside in the hall the old man whispered to Vivien:

"I han't felt easy, miss, not since Sir Morgan dug up that there gold. Anybody don't like to talk too light about calling down a judgment, but I'm bothered if this blessed gale don't look powerful like a judgment. And the Lord knows what the towans will be like to-morrow morning. I'll be frightened to go and see the way the sand will have come in on the land. Properly skeered, I'll be."

Soon after midnight Vivien sat up in bed and asked Venetia if she dared do something with her.

"I dare do anything that you dare," Venetia replied. "Especially when it's blowing hard like this. It makes me feel excited."

"Then listen! I'm going down to the library as soon as Father has gone to bed, and I'm going to give back the gold to Romare's Watchmen if I can find it."

"Vivien, would you dare do that?" Venetia gasped, staring in awe at her sister's white set face and glittering eyes.

"If it's not too late," Vivien said with a shudder.

The two girls went down several times to see if the light in the library was out; but it was after one o'clock when at last their father retired to his room.

"Are the curtains drawn close?" Vivien whispered when they stood like two shadows against the glow of the dying fire. "He would see a light from his window."

Venetia drew closer the heavy curtains of worn and faded tambour-work. The personality and presence of their father still hung upon the great room in the lingering perfume of his tobacco-smoke.

"One candle will be enough. This was where he put it," Vivien whispered, pointing to the aumbry on the left of the fireplace. "Damn, he's locked the doors."

She bent down and picked up the poker.

"My gosh, Vivien, you're not going to break in the doors?" Venetia gasped.

"I'm going to get the golden boat," her sister replied, working the point of the poker between the two oak doors of the aumbry. The old wood broke off in splinters, but at last she managed to insert her weapon behind the iron lock and with a wrench she forced the doors asunder.

"Hark," Venetia whispered. "Didn't you hear something?"

"Nothing but the wind," Vivien said. It was strangely quiet in this room, the walls of which were at least three feet thick and in which the only openings to the direction of the gale were the two lattices that lighted the carrels off the ambulatory on the north side. It was a sudden patter of hail against them which had startled Venetia. Elsewhere the wind was only heard with a deep rumbling and moaning up the chimneys.

"You take the discs," Vivien commanded. "I'll carry the boat. We'd better go back through the house and out by the tower door."

"Oh, Vivien, aren't you afraid?"

"I would do more than this to save Roan."

"But suppose the storm is only a coinstance? After all, we do get lots of bad storms here without opening up cromlechs."

"Look here," said Vivien angrily, "if you're afraid to come out with me to the Watchmen, say so, and I'll go alone."

"I'm not a bit funky of the Watchmen or the storm or going out," said Venetia. "But I *am* a bit funky of what Father will do when he finds out to-morrow. You see, if you don't tell him it was us he'll think somebody on the island has broken in and stolen them."

"But I shall tell him," said Vivien. "At least I shall tell him that it was me."

"Oh no, I'm in on this, darling. I expect you're right. But I can't help feeling a *bit* quivery inside."

They followed the top road at first, which stretched tremulous and grey before them in the dimness of the obscured decrescent

moon. But the blown grit peppered their faces so painfully that they turned off to the right into the Punchbowl and walked along under the lee of Penmarrack until they reached the lower road above the eastern store. Here there was enough shelter to move along fairly fast until they reached the gate leading to the towans where they met once more the full force of the gale tearing through the gap between Big and Little Tor. They staggered on, the wind drumming in their ears, the sand from the track so nearly blinding them that they stepped aside and walked backwards over the grass. Yet even so their cheeks were sorely stung by small pebbles and jagged snail-shells travelling on the blast. As they drew near the line of dunes that ran like a sierra along the beach, they found as Holt had prophesied that the sand had swept a hundred yards inland. Even where they stood the ground was whitening round their feet.

Suddenly Vivien shrieked.

"Romare's Watchmen have gone! Venetia, they're fallen! Oh, Father, why did you touch the gold?"

Heedless of the blinding sand, and with the strength that horror lent her to struggle against the violence of the wind, Vivien ran toward the place where yesterday afternoon the stones had towered twenty feet high and more. A balloon of spindrift scudding before the wind struck her face.

"Venetia," she cried as she blew the spray from her panting lips and wiped the salt from her eyes. "Venetia, the sea will come over Roon if we aren't quick. Venetia, hurry, hurry!"

But Romare's Watchmen had not actually fallen, for when the girls reached them they found their tops still nosing up through the drifted sand.

"How can we put the gold back?" Venetia asked in dismay. "Everything is covered up. Come away from here, Vivien, or we shall be covered up ourselves. Where are you going? Don't be such a mad idiot, Vivien."

Her sister had slid down the steep soft glissade of fine sand to the beach, where although it was only two hours after dead low water the run of the sea came nearer to the edge of the land than at the top of many a spring flood.

"I'm going to give back the gold to the sea, or else the sea will flow right over Roon!" she cried, her voice tossing on the wind.

And wading out through the spume she flung the golden boat ahead of her into the seething waters.

24

ABROAD AND HOME AGAIN

Perhaps the Knight of Roon was affected more deeply by that great north-west gale than he was prepared to admit. At any rate, he was not nearly so angry with his daughters for their outrageous display of superstitious folly as they had anticipated. He gave orders for the beach to be thoroughly searched, and when by a strange hazard the golden boat, much dented, was actually found in a tangle of wrack, he showed it to Vivien, more rueful than indignant.

"The swan and the sun have been broken off, which has quite destroyed its value. Never talk to me about vandals again, my dear girl, when I have a couple of them for daughters. To gratify your Voodooism you have destroyed what would have been the most remarkable bronze age trophy discovered since the Trundholm Chariot."

"I still think I did right," Vivien argued obstinately.

"Well, to my mind you behaved like a benighted peasant. In fact, you and your sister are fast turning into a pair of uncouth savages. Perhaps you're not really to blame. The life you've had to lead here during the war would have turned any girls into barbarians. However, perhaps a little experience of the world will give you some much needed balance. I've heard from Tom Bell this morning to say that he expects to be back here for good by the first week in January. So we'll be off very soon now."

"What are you going to do with the boat, Father?" Vivien asked.

"Presumably as the sea has considerably returned it to me you will not object to my disposing of it as I think fit?"

"I wish you'd put it back in the cromlech."

"The cromlech is filled up with sand, and the men will be more usefully employed in trying to prevent any further encroachment on the towans. I'm having hurdles put all the way along on both sides. They will stop the drifting and give the marram-grass time to bind the sand again. But the less digging we do now the better. By the way, a couple of the sun-discs were found as well as the boat. Wouldn't you like one of them for your museum?"

"Our museum has been shut up since Murdo was killed," Vivien said, with a cruelty she could not help.

Her father turned away without another word.

In the first week of January Dick wrote to say that he should be demobilized before the end of the month, and that he had made arrangements to go to the Channel Islands to study the commercial side of flower-growing.

In a way I'm glad that you're going abroad, he wrote, because I don't believe that otherwise I should ever have had the strength of mind to keep away from Lyonesse. Do tell me that you admire my severe attention to the practical side of the future. My trustees are not apparently over-thrilled by my intention of becoming a flower-grower. They cannot understand why I don't go back to the Temple. However, I haven't broached the subject of investing any of my capital yet as I thought it wiser to let them see that I know my own mind. One of the queer effects of the war on elderly people is their firm conviction that no young man who has lived through it can ever possibly settle down again, and they will assume we are the same age as when we joined up. Another thing that makes me glad you're going abroad is that you will have some reason to insist that you know your own mind when the question of our being openly engaged comes up next time. What an ass I did make of myself!

The ring I send you with this isn't an engagement ring for the world to laugh at. But wear it sometimes when you are alone. The stone isn't an aquamarine, though it looks like one. It's a small zircon. I saw it all by itself on a piece of faded blue velvet in a small jeweller's shop in a back street of Cologne, and as I passed the window it flashed across my eye like the water below the little wood that April afternoon. It was snowing fast, and I stood breathless for a moment with you in my arms. I've had it set in a very thin ring of white gold, and though it looks like something out of a cracker I do hope you'll wear it sometimes when you are alone. If the weather's fine enough, do go over to Carrackoon before you leave and see if Crocus Imperati is out yet. I planted some, and they usually are out by the first week in January. Pick one and send it to me if you can.

That frail circlet of pallid gold set with a glittering drop of seawater was for Vivien how much more than Ophir.

"You won't throw that into the sea," said Venetia, smiling.

The two girls rowed over to Carrackoon that morning and found the crocuses—tigered buff and mauve they were, and for Dick their flattened petals staining his love-letter far surpassed the roses of Sharon.

Tom Bell arrived three or four days after this.

"Of course he looks more like a bit of left luggage than a lieutenant," Vivien said scornfully. "I knew he would."

"Oh, yes, he does, doesn't he, Vivien?" Venetia agreed. "Like those dumpy parcels you see marked 'carriage forward.'"

"He wouldn't be marked 'carriage forward,'" Vivien laughed. "He'd be marked 'carriage behind.'"

"Oh, yes, of course he would," said Venetia. "Oh, do let me tell Holt what you said, because he will laugh so."

The dislike of the two girls for Tom Bell was not entirely due to the lessons in arithmetic which they had had to endure from him, although anybody who had been instructed by Tom Bell could never have felt well disposed toward him again. But he had a variety of faults from their point of view, and they profoundly sympathized with the opinion that nearly all the people on Roon held about him. First of all he was considered a sneak. At some-time or other everybody had had to complain of being sneaked about, everybody that is except Jervis and Siddle. But then Jervis and Siddle were sneaks themselves. So Jervis, Siddle, and Tom Bell respected one another accordingly, and each was resolved not to sneak about the others until he had something so tremendous to sneak about that there would be no chance of retaliation. The Knight would not allow that Tom Bell was a sneak. There came a time, he said, when it was Tom Bell's duty to report to him that things were going wrong. Holt was a dear old fellow, but he had one great fault as bailiff. He could not bear to level a specific complaint against any individual working under him. There were a dozen rascals that would have been kept in his employ, the Knight argued, unless he had been helped to find them out by Tom Bell. No, Tom Bell was not a sneak, and if the girls persisted in saying that he was he should get angry.

Secondly Tom Bell was considered a coward. Whenever he stirred up strife by his interference, he always ran to the Knight for protection. He could only stand up for himself by shouting, which was the first sign of a coward according to the girls. Dogs barked when they were afraid. And people shouted. Yet here again

they did Tom Bell an injustice according to their father who could mention a score of plucky deeds done by his estate-accountant. "Only when you're looking on," they argued. "Only when he's more afraid of you than he is of a loose bull." Then Tom Bell was considered a bully; but that might be included in his cowardice, because all bullies were cowards. So, too, perhaps might his toadying, "which is enough to make you sick," said Vivien and Venetia, when they watched Tom Bell walking round the farm with their father, a look of eager awe sparkling in his beady eyes while he jotted down in a notebook the words of wisdom uttered by his master. "As if Tom Bell was Moses," said Vivien, "and Father was the Padre Eterno."

Thirdly Tom Bell was considered ambitious. Of that there was no doubt, although the girls were at a loss when they warned their father about Tom Bell's ambition, to say precisely of what he was ambitious. "Naturally he hopes to manage Roon for me ultimately," said the Knight. "That's a perfectly reasonable ambition for him to have. Holt is getting an old man, and I would much sooner have Tom Bell than a stranger." "But he never could manage Roon," his daughters argued. "Look at the way the men hate him." "Only because he looks after my interests a bit more than some of them. Poor Tom Bell has to cut down the expenses and consequently he incurs all the odium that should belong to me by rights." "Yes, he's a penny wise," said Vivien, "but he's often a good many pounds foolish."

Finally Tom Bell was declared a thick-headed fool. "Not such a fool as you think," said the Knight. "I know that he's a bit slow to grasp my meaning at once, but he grasps it in the end, and once he has grasped it he takes care to see that what I want is done." "Yes, when he knows you're at his back," Venetia argued. "But he must be a fool, or he wouldn't always agree with you, Father. You must be wrong sometimes, but Tom Bell's such a fool that he thinks you're always right."

The real explanation of Tom Bell's virtues (for in spite of the girls he had many virtues) and of his faults was a devouring passion to spend the rest of his life on the island. Ten years ago he had come to Roon as a seedy clerk recommended to Sir Morgan by a friend of his in London with whom Tom Bell had been ever since he was an office-boy. From the moment he landed on the pier the spell of Roon had never for a single instant lost its potency. He was quite incapable then and he was equally incapable now of

putting into words this fascination. To hear him talk about the island you might suppose that he regarded it merely as a quantity of inconveniences accumulated within a small compass. Tom Bell was only eloquent in figures, and if he could have kept the tides by double entry, expressed the seasons in a quadratic equation, or turned the whole island into a surd, people might have found out how much he loved it. It was the fear of waking from the enchantment into which he had fallen that made him speak to Sir Morgan about the men and that made him a penny wise and a pound foolish—wise for Sir Morgan and foolish for the island, which treated him as a courtesan often treats a bumpkin. His fear of Jervis and Siddle was his fear of finding himself no longer wanted on Roon. His hectoring manner was an attempt to bolster himself up with the confidence he lacked. His cringing to Sir Morgan was his cringing to the owner of Roon—a status which did seem to Tom Bell something akin to divinity. And his ambition was not nearly so much to manage Roon as to live there for the rest of his life. Even his thick-headedness was a kind of perpetual stupefaction at being on the island. As the girls expected, he returned from the war immensely proud of being a lieutenant, but they did him an injustice when they attributed his pride to self-complacency. The commission he had won had in Tom Bell's imagination done the island credit. That the estate-accountant of Roon should be Lieutenant Thomas Rowntree Bell was much more seemly than that he should be plain Tom Bell. His experience in the Army only made him more than ever determined never to leave Roon if he could possibly avoid doing so and, when the Knight explained to him about the urgent need for economy, the estate-accountant was prepared to achieve it at any cost to his own popularity.

"I see no need why you shouldn't call yourself my agent if such a barren title please you."

"Thank you, Sir Morgan. It would define my position a bit more clearly," said Tom Bell humbly.

"And remember I don't want to have my life made a burden to me while I'm abroad by letters of complaint from everybody. You've got to use a little tact."

"I think my experience in the Army has taught me that, Sir Morgan."

"Has it?" said the Knight dryly. "You must be the first person it has. Well, I've made it clear to Holt that retrenchment all round

is imperative. The heifers are to be sold, and remember I don't want any more steers. The loss of that hay in the gale last month was a serious matter, and we don't want to be buying our feed in Penzawn. When I come back in April I may find that I have a little more spare cash, but meanwhile I wish to take no risks of any kind."

This affirmation from a man who was proposing to risk a good deal more than his spare cash on a system for winning money at roulette deserved to be treated with less gravity than Tom Bell accorded it.

"Look after the dogs well, Holt," said Vivien that afternoon.

"I will miss, if the new agent will leave me. Ho-ho-ho! My goodness, did you ever hear such a thing? I suppose I'll have to be calling him 'sir.' But I bean't a-going to. He've been Tom Bell to me these ten years and he won't never be Lootenant Bell nor Agent Bell not if I live to be so old as Methusalem."

"And look after Cerberus, Holt," Venetia added.

"Have 'ce asked the Lootenant what allowance of corn he be going to be allowed?"

"What's it got to do with him?" Venetia asked scornfully.

"Oh, my goodness, miss, you mustn't talk so light about the big drum we've got on Roon now. Why, I believe I've got to ask him when I'm to put on a clean shirt. Pooh! Bah! 'Tis nonsensical. Do'ee know what Sam Hockin said? He said if the Lootenant interfered with him he'd plaster his mouth up for him wi' martar. And I'm bothered if he wouldn't! Sam's the man to do what he says he will."

"I bet Tom Bell won't have a very easy time of it," Venetia said to her sister when they had finished their last injunctions to Holt.

"Perhaps it'll knock some of the conceit out of him," Vivien replied.

"Now, if father had been sensible," Venetia went on, "he'd have offered the job of looking after Roon to Dick."

"But he isn't sensible," said Vivien on whose nerves the Knight's confident talk about the difference to everything that his visit to Monte Carlo was going to make had been having a bad effect lately. "So what's the good of 'ifs'?"

Yet, could the girls but have perceived it, there was something pathetic in Tom Bell's desperate sense of responsibility, and something almost tragic in the fact that not a single human being had

the least idea of his devotion to Roon. And when they were laughing at the self-important way in which he superintended their embarkation and were calling him monarch of all he surveyed as he stood at the end of the pier saluting the *Mermaid's* departure, Tom Bell himself was planning by what possible means he could persuade the Knight to let him apply his small war gratuity to the service of Roon.

Not even the excitement of new clothes compensated the girls for the bewilderment in which they passed those days in London. There was even a moment when Sir Morgan himself began to ask if it really was worth while going abroad until the passport regulations had been mitigated.

"I say, Father, you've put down your nose as medium," Venetia protested. "I should have called it very large. And oh, I say, look here, you've put down my eyes as green. They aren't! You'll get arrested if you aren't jolly careful, and it will serve you right. Oh, and Vivien he's put down your mouth as large. Father, how can you call your nose medium and Vivien's mouth large? You ought to have put 'perfect medium bow' and for me 'thinnish lips curling up at the sides.'"

"Good gad, girl, do you think I'm a damned novelist?" the Knight demanded.

However, Monte Carlo was reached at last, and some letters from the girls to Dick will serve to show what they thought of it.

Grand Hotel des Mimosées,
Monte Carlo.

Feb. 15.

My dearest,

I loved your last letter and I am so glad that you think you were wise to go to Guernsey. How nice for you to be looking across the sea at two islands like Roon and Carrackoon. I wish we were. But don't fall in love with Herm and Jethou, or we shall be jealous. They sound much easier to fall in love with than the ridiculous people here. We simply hate Monte Carlo, and I don't think the weather is so wonderful as people pretend. Perhaps if we could go to Italy it would be better. But apparently father is stuck here for the whole of the Spring. He talked a great deal about going to Florence and visiting mother's relations near Perugia and even of Rome and Naples. But now he's here it looks as if he intended to remain. Apparently his system is working well at present and

he has made quite a lot of money. So he's in a delightful mood and showers presents on Venetia and me. But we just hate everything. When people talk to me I lean back and think about you. And, my dearest, such people! As far as I can see all the nice people have been killed. It makes me resent the war a thousand times more when I look round the dining-room at this hotel.

Dick, my darling, my darling, I want to be home again and I want you. I can't even write to you properly here in this eternal clatter and clinking. I sit down in our bedroom and think I'm going to fly away from it all in writing to you, and then I start resenting it all and get in a detestable frame of mind. Do you ever realize what a little time we've had together since we knew that we loved each other? Not even a whole day. And yet when I think of those hours they fill the whole of my life. This is a stupid fretful letter, but to-day I just feel I can't live much longer without being with you all the time. I'm utterly lovesick. I send you more kisses than all the seconds put together in our two lives before ever we knew each other. And oh, Dick, if I could only tell you instead of writing that I am more, much more than ever

*Your own
Vivien.*

*Grand Hotel des Mimosées,
Monte Carlo.*

March 15.

My dearest Dick,

*We simply HATE this beastly place. And Father has lost all he won at first, and I don't know when we shall ever get away from here. I am glad you like Gurnsey, which looks a bit unspelt somehow. I thought it must be a nice place because our cows on Roon are so nice. This hotel is full of profiteers who the Italians call *pesci cani*, and that means sharks. There is a family of Armenian profiteers at the next table to us, a fat greasy father, a frightfully fat greasy wife, a fat greasy daughter, a fat greasy older son, and the most collossolly fat younger son you ever saw. They all wear very tight white shoes with patent-leather toes and when they walk into the dining-room as if they were treading on hot bricks, even the waiters have to turn aside and hide their smiles. They gobble their food like pigs, but their shoes hurt them so much that they cannot enjoy it.*

March 16.

I will resume this letter where I left off. The Armenyan proffiteeress dropped her necklace in her soup and sucked it dry herself! And the father wears four diamond rings on one finger, and he is so anxious for people to admire them that he picks his teeth with that finger and waggles it about to make the diamonds flash. And all the proffiteers have secretaries with titles who they shout for and order about in front of people which makes you feel sick. One has actually got an Italian prince, and I feel quite sorry for our Italian relations when I hear this man shout "Principe! Principe! Have you taken those seats for the concert? Principe! Go up to my room and bring down that picture I bought yesterday for fifty-thousand francs. I want to show it to my friend the Duka."

And now an English proffiteer called Sir Caleb Fuller, Bart has arrived, with a chubby face and white curly hair. He lives in Cheshire and has a perpetual grin, so we call him the Cheshire Cat. He has a yacht, and I'm sorry to say that he has made friends with Father. Vivien hates it here even more than me, and we make exceeding moan.

Love and kisses

From your loving

Venetia.

Father has had a very bad run of luck, Vivien wrote a fortnight later, and he is evidently very worried. I think with some vague idea of economizing he has accepted an invitation to go with this Fuller man for a cruise in his yacht. You can imagine what Venetia and I feel about it. Particularly as Venetia was beginning to enjoy herself a little, having renewed acquaintance with that Captain Neville who was with Colonel Manton for a time, and came over to Roon one afternoon. He met you somewhere, and spoke very nicely about you.

*On board S.Y. Butterfly,
Naples.*

April 15.

My dearest Dick,

I'm glad you remember my young man and think he's a nice young man. But our brief idill did not last, and we are now separated by the foaming waves, having been invited to make a voyage with

Sir Caleb Fuller, Bart Who I think invited us in order to study barting. Since he met Father he's been barting a little bit better, but he still argues about his bills everywhere, and yesterday he asked Vivien and I to walk with him to a corall shop in Naples and explain that they'd charged him ten centesimi too much for a brooch he bought, and whenever he goes out alone he comes back with about six guides who Mr. Piddock the secretary has to deal with, because they wo'nt leave him. He says that there is no honesty anywhere except in England, and that he is more proud than ever to be an Englishman. He is Fuller's Fireworks, but he was made a bart for making a patent bomb that killed more people than any other bomb. He has a son called Norman, but fortunately Norman isn't with him. He was ordered to yacht by his doctor to get over the strain of the war. His coat of arms arrived by post last week. We hoped it was going to be a squib rampant, but it's only seven stars with the motto sic itur ad astra. Vivien says it ought to have been sick not sic because he's always moderately sea-sick. But we must not boast, for humiliating though it is to confess it, both Vivien and I have been more than a little sick ourselves. We told Father he ought to be ashamed at his age to start giving lessons in barting, but he says that we do not appreciate Sir Caleb Fuller, Bart who is a man of bussiness. Anyway, the best news is this. The Cheshire Cat is going home by train, and we are going home by ourselves in the yacht, and we'll be home by the beginning of May.

Love and kisses

*From your loving
Venetia.*

As a matter of fact Sir Morgan had lost a great deal more money than his daughters supposed. He had ascribed the failure of the infallible system for winning at roulette to his own mistake in changing over from baccarat; and when after losing more than he could afford at roulette he set out to try to win it back from the cards, fortune was against him. By the beginning of April he had seriously endangered his financial position. It was no longer a question of lacking ready money to waste; it had become a question of mortgaging Roon to find the wherewithal to maintain it. Luckily it was not feasible to mortgage the island where he was, or no doubt the Knight would have done so and flung the money away after the rest in a desperate effort to save the situation. This was the state of affairs when he made the acquaintance of Sir Caleb Fuller, who

in the course of conversation expressed his astonishment that Sir Morgan had never considered the commercial possibilities of his island.

"Now that the war is over," he said in that gentle voice of his which seemed to express a kind of childish awe at the wonderful things there were to do in this world, and beaming at the Knight to express the immensity of the good will he bore him, "there will be great opportunity to develop places. Look at me, Sir Morgan. I'm quite at a loss for the moment. Of course, with the prospect of peace being definitely reached in the summer, we are hard at work with our fireworks again, for naturally fireworks will be much in demand for the celebrations, but speaking for myself and some of my colleagues we were really a tiny little bit disappointed when the war came to an end just when it did."

It was a characteristic of Sir Caleb Fuller to use affectionate diminutives about everything; he barely restrained himself from speaking of the "poor dear little war."

"I lost my only son in France," said Sir Morgan shortly.

Sir Caleb's smile melted instantaneously into an expression of wide-eyed commiseration.

"Oh, of course I didn't really mean we wanted the dreadful business to last a moment longer. It was only that we had invented a new shell and we had such a lot of them, *all* waiting to go out, and we'd worked so hard at this shell that it was just a tiny bit disappointing not to have had a chance of seeing what it could do. We had such hopes of that shell."

A dreamy look came into Sir Caleb's eyes. He was thinking about his Ideals. Then with a bright expression he came back to the topic with which the conversation had started.

"Yes, I certainly advise you to develop your island, Sir Morgan. And after all it's such a pleasure to think that one's money all comes from giving other people a little pleasure. That's what I feel about fireworks."

The Knight had been inclined to be contemptuous at first of Sir Caleb Fuller's suggestion. But the more he thought about it, the sounder it began to seem. Anyway something would have to be done unless he wanted to lose his island. Perhaps this fellow Fuller might be inclined to invest some of his own money in Roon. One laughed at these mushrooms which had sprung up from the corpse-fed fields of Europe; but after all there they were, and the most poisonous-looking fungus was often edible when well cooked. Partly

because it seemed an excellent opportunity to begin the cooking of Sir Caleb Fuller prior to eating him up, partly because a short voyage in the *Butterfly* would salve his conscience over his neglected duty toward his daughters, the Knight cordially accepted the invitation to spend a fortnight or so on board the yacht, a fortnight which ended in an extremely pleasant trip home at Sir Caleb Fuller's expense.

"Come," said the Knight when the *Butterfly* dropped anchor in Falmouth harbour on a sparkling morning early in the month of May, "this has been a delightful wind up to our holiday."

And that evening in the magic of a pink and green May dusk the *Mermaid* glided into the harbour of Roon.

"Oh, Vivien darling, we're home again!" Venetia cried, clasping her sister to her when they were on their way up the drive toward the House.

"Isn't it perfect?" Vivien murmured.

And they stood in silence, gazing down the wooded slopes where the dim bluebells made rich the air under a slender moon of ivory.

25

GOLD

Tom Bell was full of the iniquity of everybody on the island when he discussed the future of Roon with Sir Morgan on his return. According to him his attempts at economy had been frustrated by obstinacy and ill-will.

"They ought all to have served the same as I did, Sir Morgan," he said wrathfully. "I'd only got to give the simplest order to have 'em all up against me. Only last week when I was paying out, Sam Hockin shouted, 'Now then, boys, quick march, and don't forget to salute when Lieutenant Bell speaks to you.' Of course I knew he was only trying to create disorder. So I never said a thing. Just bit my tongue and kept still. But it made me angry when they all started in to giggle."

"It'll take more than economy to keep things going on Roon much longer," said the Knight. "I hardly know where to find the money for the wages, even. What are we paying out every week now?"

"Would you like to see my books, Sir Morgan?"

The Knight declined fretfully. Tom Bell's ledgers were the outward sign of his difficulties. The mere sight of their marbled boards and leather backs threw him into a state of nervous irritation. And those long columns that could make twenty pounds of a few odd shillings before Tom turned over the page enraged him by their ruthless attention to arithmetical fact.

"Surely to goodness you know what we're paying in wages every week without turning over those confounded ledgers?" he growled.

"Yes, Sir Morgan. Last week we paid out £43 10s. That included the staff indoors."

"Well, I can't afford it. We must cut down still more. I tell you I haven't the ready money, Bell. How much do I owe in Penzawn?"

Tom Bell reached out for his ledgers.

"You can give me a rough idea, can't you, without swishing those infernal leaves in my face?"

The Knight always preferred a rough idea of his obligations.

"Well, Sir Morgan, it wouldn't be less than £700 now."

"Call it £800," said the Knight.

"That would be nearer the mark," Tom Bell admitted, with a longing glance toward his books.

"Call it £900," said the Knight. "It's not more than that?"

"Oh, no, Sir Morgan. Not so much."

"How much is it exactly?" The Knight closed his eyes while Tom Bell muttered over his figures and finally announced that he owed £797 15s. 10d. in Penzawn.

"Ah, well, you see it's not quite so bad," said the Knight in a tone of relief, for he felt that he had already paid off £102 4s. 2d. by allowing for that amount in excess of the reality.

"And nobody's worrying me much," Tom Bell went on encouragingly. "I thought perhaps if you could let me have a cheque for £250, Sir Morgan, we could carry on for another three months, and perhaps you'd be having some more money coming in then."

The Knight frowned to himself.

"My own personal debts don't amount to more than £500. Wait a minute, though, I forgot my daughters' clothes. Better call it £700. Well, to be absolutely on the safe side I'll call it £800. If I say that I owe £2,000 altogether I am allowing a comfortable margin. It's not so much as that really."

"No, Sir Morgan."

"Then there's my overdraft. That's £3,000. So, you see, £5,000 would put me absolutely straight."

"Yes, Sir Morgan."

"£5,000," the Knight repeated. "If those Austrian bonds hadn't gone down to nothing or if those rascally Bolsheviks hadn't messed up Russia, I should be perfectly all right. As it is, my bank is pressing me to repay the overdraft. That probably means selling out at a loss. What on earth are banks for if they can't afford to lend out £3,000 at perfectly good interest? The other alternative is to mortgage Roon. But if I do that, where am I going to find the ready money to maintain it? Tom, I'm damnably fixed."

Tom Bell shuffled his feet nervously.

"I've got £150 put by," he told the Knight. "That would pay the wages and outgoings for three weeks if we were careful."

The Knight smiled.

"You're a good fellow, Tom. I shan't forget that. And by gad, if it comes to it I'll accept your money to show you how much I appreciate your offer. But we've got to think now of the ultimate future as well as the immediate future."

Tom Bell screwed up his eyes and concentrated his gaze upon the Knight in order to grasp what he was talking about. He might have been listening to a subtle metaphysician.

"The ultimate future, Tom," Sir Morgan went on. "I could sell the last lot of my securities that are any good, and I might raise £5,000. Well, that would put me straight if the island could be made to pay for itself. Now, Tom, how is the island to be made to do that?"

Tom Bell looked blank.

"It will never pay as a farm. It will never pay as a quarry. Copper and silver mining were a failure. What other way is there of making money out of it?"

Tom Bell looked blank.

"By developing it, Tom Bell. By developing it as a pleasure resort," said the Knight.

"In what way, Sir Morgan?"

"In what way?" the Knight repeated. "You really are a stupid fellow, Tom. Why, by throwing it open to trippers!"

Tom Bell looked blank.

"By charging them a toll to land. By opening a tea-house in the Old Inn. Oh, there are a dozen ways of developing the island to make it attractive. No doubt it will be an infernal bore. But we shall get in the necessary ready money to pay our way. Now, if we intend to develop Roon, it will obviously be wiser to sell

those securities rather than mortgage the island. You see why, of course?"

Tom Bell, looking not a whit less blank, declared that he did, in the hope that presently the Knight would afford him some clue to understanding why.

"I'll write to my bank to-night," Sir Morgan announced enthusiastically. "Meanwhile, what you've got to do is to go into the project with the hotel keepers in Penzawn. They ought to be delighted. Why, it will double the attraction of the place if Roon is available for the mob. And that reminds me; I must make a strong point with Mr. Penfold about the necessity of the Palatinate's letting me have Carrackoon. We shall want both islands if my scheme is to work. You must sound the boat-owners too. By gad, Tom, I believe I'm going to be the first to make the island show a profit. You'll hear people say I'm casual about money, Tom. Oh yes, you will. But you can tell 'em from me that if I give my mind to making money I'll do it with anybody. I've never tried to make money yet, Tom. By gad, you'll be astonished when you find what a head I've got for business. I'm going to be thorough over this, Tom. No confounded sentimental hanky-panky. Roon is going to show a profit. You mark my words, Tom Bell."

A fortnight later the Knight threw a cheque for £250 across the table to his agent.

"There you are! Divide that up among the Penzawn creditors in the best way. It's no good paying them right off. Nothing destroys a man's credit so quick as paying his debts right off. Keep 'em waiting for the rest. Make a favour of settling a quarter of the bill. You know the way, Tom. Make a confounded favour of it, d'ye hear? Just to show you that when I really get down to business, Tom, I'm always likely to err on the side of caution, I'll tell you this. Instead of £5,000 I got £6,300 for those securities. What do you think of that? That means to say that I now have over £2,500 in my current account."

Tom Bell looked at the Knight as Aladdin may have looked at Abanazar on being shown the cave.

"But that's not going to make me any less careful, Tom. Don't you think I'm going to spend it all on paying off everything I owe. We want something in hand if we're going to make a success of our scheme, Tom. Look here, I'm going to put your salary up to five pounds a week. And I don't mind telling you this, Tom Bell. You know that when it comes down to hard figures I'm not inclined to

exaggerate? Very well then, if I can make a profit of one thousand pounds on the year, you shall have six pounds a week. You deserve it, Tom, because you've been so quick to see the possibilities in my scheme. This island is going to be turned into a little gold-mine. I'll tell you something more now. While I was abroad I met a fellow who'd made one of these war fortunes. He was tremendously interested in the possibilities of Roon. I asked him to come and stay with me this summer. Suppose we persuade him to invest twenty thousand or so in Roon? Eh, Tom? And between you and me I have not the slightest doubt that he will. So get on with our preparations as quickly as possible."

The next day the Knight flourished another cheque at Tom Bell.

"See that? By gad, Tom this is going to be a lucky year for me financially. You know we claimed £700 from the government for the damage done to the cottages? Well, they've paid up!"

"£700, Sir Morgan?" Tom Bell whispered in awe.

"Not quite seven hundred, of course. But they've paid four hundred and fifty, and that'll come in very useful for our plan to turn the cottages into popular tea-rooms and keep the Inn for people who want to spend a little more and be really comfortable. What's the feeling in Penzawn?"

"I think everybody thinks it will be good for the district, Sir Morgan."

"Everybody? But confound it, I don't want everybody to know about my plans yet. I told you to sound one or two of the boat-owners and hotel managers. You've been talking too much, Tom Bell."

"No, Sir Morgan, I haven't. But things always get round."

"I suppose it's all over the island by now?"

The Knight was wondering about his daughters, to whom he had not yet mentioned a word of his plan. He knew that they would both protest against it. That he could stand. But if they should argue against the likelihood of its practical success, that would make him really angry.

"I believe Hamblyn was saying something about it to Sam Hockin on the pier this morning," Tom Bell admitted, "because I passed the remark that it was a funny thing Hockin never had time to do a job when it was wanted, but always had plenty of time to stand about gossiping on the pier."

After hearing this the Knight was not surprised that morning by the sudden irruption of his two daughters into the library.

"Father, what's this ridiculous rumour Holt has got hold of that you're going to throw the island open to trippers this Summer?" Vivien demanded.

"I told him he was mad," Venetia added.

"I should be much obliged," said the Knight sternly, "if you two girls would condescend to knock before you burst through my door like a couple of clowns jumping through a hoop. Holt is an infernal gossip. As a matter of fact, however, I am contemplating the experiment."

"Father!" they both cried.

"Something has to be done," he said testily. "And I imagine you would prefer this to my letting Roon or even possibly getting rid of it altogether? I have been very badly hit financially by the war. It is only an experiment, and I have no desire to hear your opinion of it. I am doing what is best for everybody. It's a bore, but times have changed, and we are changed with them—*nos et mutamur*."

"What will the island do about it?" Vivien asked.

"Now listen, Vivien," said the Knight. "I'm thoroughly sick of this tiresome personification of my island—it is still mine, you know—in which you are perpetually indulging. The best thing you can do is to hope and pray that my plan turns out a success."

"It won't," Vivien declared.

"It won't," Venetia added.

"Well, get out of my room," the Knight ordered. "I don't want you vaticinating in here like a couple of pert Cassandras."

Although Vivien had always had a dread at the back of her mind that her father might lose Roon, she did not know how near he was to really doing so at last, and his proposal to turn the island into a place of entertainment for Penzawn trippers struck her merely as wanton greed caused by his losses at Monte Carlo this spring.

A day or two after the announcement that from July 1st until September 30th the island would be thrown open to visitors on payment of a shilling toll the other rick caught fire in a mysterious manner, and fifty tons of good seasoned hay was destroyed—a serious loss indeed with hay at the price it was then. This coming on top of the loss of the large rick during the January gale, a poor crop last year, and an even poorer crop this year meant that all next winter hay would have to be bought for the stock, and not only bought, but carried over from the mainland as well. Vivien argued that the burning of the rick was a sign that the island disliked the

prospect of having its charm hired out to trippers; but her father maintained angrily that if it meant anything at all beyond somebody's abominable carelessness it meant that the island disliked being farmed, adding with a wry laugh that he had no intention of hurting its susceptibilities that way much longer.

"I'll make a golf-course on Roon, if Roon can't behave itself," he threatened.

This was beyond anything, and his daughters fled as from a blasphemer.

"I think he's gone mad," Venetia declared.

"I've thought so for some time," Vivien agreed.

For the rest of that fine dry June the girls spent all their time wandering about the island while still the precious solitude of it belonged to them. Their father was too much engaged with Tom Bell in preparing for the entertainment of his profitable visitors to bother about Venetia's lessons, and Vivien agreed with her that it would be much better to work when the island was no longer truly their own.

On Midsummer Eve Venetia vanished at sunset as had always been her wont upon this magic date. This year it was a splendid sunset of red and green and gold into which from the top of Little Tor Vivien watched her wandering into diminutiveness across the rose-starred towans, before she herself went home to write a long letter to Dick, whose excitement over the progress he was making in the art of growing flowers for the market was the only hope for the future.

This is a terrific ordeal, he had written in his last letter, but I do comfort myself with the old platitude that nothing worth while comes without a struggle. I'm always finding out the truth of these great commonplaces with every month I add to my age. But you must find them out for yourself. I'm quite ready to learn from age and give the lie to 'si jeunesse savait' by believing any wise old man who will instruct me. But the odd thing is that I'm at once up against 'experientia docet.' Faith is perfectly useless for the things of this world, and all this week as I've been going over the Ornatus bulbs for replanting I've been dimly beginning to apprehend the fundamental difference between experience and faith. No amount of experience will give you a belief in God. No amount of faith will give you a belief in the fact that a rolling stone gathers no moss or that too many cooks spoil the broth. But there is one thing in this world, my darling, that I do believe with faith. I believe that after

this separation we shall be happy together for the rest of our lives. Yet can our love properly be called one of the facts of this world? As I sit here thinking of you it seems to belong to fairyland. My Vivien, what have you not learnt from Merlin? You have turned my eyes to magic casements, for night and day they open on perilous seas in faerie lands forlorn. Forlorn! The very word is indeed like a bell to toll me back to my sole self. But I have one great consolation in Guernsey. There's only the sea between you and me, my adored girl, and in spite of Matthew Arnold I don't believe that the sea is half so estranging as the land. I can swim here in the waves that roll in from Roon, and I can always imagine that the very water which holds me has held you. I can watch the sun go down into the sea and know as he goes down at this season of the year that you and Roon are this side of him with nothing between us except a hundred and thirty miles of golden water. Inland there would be people and houses and fields and hedges and dusty roads and squalid streets between you and me. Oh, my own, my sweet, how I adore you.

It is Venetia who is in fairyland to-night, Vivien wrote back to Dick upon that midsummer eve while the White Ermine moths fluttered round her lamp or walked with glowing red eyes and vibrant wings about the paper. Ever since she was a tiny girl she has spent to-night with the fairies. An hour ago I watched her wandering off into the sunset across the towans. She'll be fifteen this autumn! Oh, Dick, and when she met you first she was twelve. It does seem such a waste of these years that we aren't together. But Venetia isn't too old yet to see the fairies, and so I'll try not to keep sighing to myself 'When? When?' I think if you were here to-night, my darling, I would take you out with me to a little hollow on Rosevean which is quite hidden by blackthorns, so that we should have to crawl in on all fours through the prickles, but when we were once inside we should be in a green world of our own so still that we could sit there by candlelight. I believe if we were together we should see the fairies to-night. My dearest, why aren't we together, just this midsummer eve? We might sit in the pinewood perhaps, or should we go down to Greenwater, and sit among the foxgloves? Oh, but it wouldn't matter where we went if we could only go together. I'm so dreading this opening of the island to trippers. Venetia says that if Roon is really angry with us she'll see no fairies to-night. I shan't sleep till she comes home at dawn. How ridiculous

most people would think us, wouldn't they? But you understand what we feel. You don't think us mad and foolish creatures. Dearest, I've never given you anything of myself yet. I've always felt shy and stupid. But one day I will give you myself so utterly that you will say 'never since the world began was anybody loved as I am loved.' How dull my letters are! When I read about lovers in books they always seem able to explain everything they feel so cleverly, and I wonder if that is because it is a clever person who is writing about them, or if it is because I am much more stupid than most girls. But I can't explain what I feel about you and about our love any more than I could explain the way a train carries one along. I don't care a bit about the way things work. I only know that all the time, every moment of the day and of the night, waking and sleeping, dreaming, reading, writing, swimming, walking, I am always hurrying along as fast as I can to you. If ever I stop to think I feel as if I were shooting through space like a star to you. I love you more to-night than I have ever loved you, and yet it's not worth writing that, because by the time you read it I shall be loving you so much more that it won't have been worth writing or reading. Dick, I adore you, oh, I adore you so.

In the frail light of the midsummer dawn when with every breath of the limpid air lavender was melting into rose and rose was hardening to pearl, when the eastern sky hung thin and lucent as a shell and night like a great grey dove was flying down into the darker west, Venetia woke her sister. In spite of what she had written Vivien had fallen fast asleep on Dick's last letter, which had been crackling like a kindled fire beneath her pillow whenever she had turned murmurously and called to him, wandering alone through the vast uneasy air of sleep.

"Venetia, what's the matter?"

Woken thus suddenly and seeing Venetia's dew-dabbled hair and pale face and her glittering eyes wide open in alarm Vivien trembled to hear of some fresh woe for Roon.

"I've lost my gold locket with mother's picture," her little sister panted.

"When did you miss it?"

"Not till just now as I was coming in."

"Are you sure you had it when you went out?"

"Oh yes, my dear, I had it. Of course I had it. I never go out at night without it. Vivien, the island has never taken anything from

me that I really cared about. It took that pipe I found, but anyway that was its own pipe. But never has it taken anything like this."

"Where have you been all night?"

"Why, Vivien, I've been everywhere, of course."

"Well, darling, I'll help you look out for it later. Come and lie down now. We shall see it more easily when it shines in the sun and the dew is dry." As she spoke Vivien looked down at her finger to see if Dick's ring was safe. Yes, there it was, frail and fine and lovely as the dawn.

"I shall only see it if the island wants to give it back to me," said Venetia. "But if it took it on purpose I shall never see it again."

Vivien had some difficulty in persuading her sister to undress and try to sleep until breakfast. She wanted to go out forthwith and begin the search. In the end, however, she listened to good advice, and being quite worn out by her night-wandering she did not long lie awake to bemoan her loss. After breakfast it was settled that she should search all the island south of the House and that Vivien should search the towans.

"But I don't think it's on that side," Venetia said. "Because I'm sure I remember touching it long after I'd left the towans. I expect it's in one of the blackthorn dells in Rosevean if it's anywhere."

Since farming had not been so high on Roon, although Holt might deplore the appearance of the fields, the beauty of their disarray was exquisite. Pickpurse may not be a weed that proclaims good tillage, but on this midsummer morning its innumerable seed-cases had flung across the limeless clover in High Lea a mantle of clouded apricot. Bramble Top, a small enclosure once famous for its barley, was spread out like a white and scarlet standard with a fringe of gilded tassels where the poppies and ox-eyed daisies or gadjevraus as they called them on Roon were surrounded by corn-marigolds; and in Tor Field over the faded velvet of the mouse-ear that covered the caked soil a profusion of viper's bugloss in full flower glittered against the sun like strings of pale blue sapphires. Vivien gazed back at them as she turned downhill beside Big Tor to reach the towans, and she was near to falling upon her knees in worship of all that azurine radiancy. Then she glanced at her own hand to watch how her sea-blue stone set in the frail circlet of pallid gold would flash in rivalry with those myriads of flowery jewels; but, when she looked, the ring was gone.

In a paroxysm of tearless sobs Vivien retraced her steps, searching every yard of the hot dusty road, foraging in the cool herbage of the ditches on either side, striking down with her cane the brittle kexes till the air was heavy with their sickly pungency. Every yard she ransacked as far as the tower, and in the tower itself there was not an inch of the schoolroom and the nursery that escaped her search. She remembered perfectly well taking off the ring to go down to breakfast, and she remembered equally well putting it on again when she came upstairs for her hat. The ring must be somewhere between here and Big Tor. She went out once more into the fervid air to search the road and the ditches anew. Fragments of granite spangled with golden mica winked in the sunlight only to deceive when she stooped to pick up her beloved ring; and hardly a speedwell bud by the roadside but brought her heart into her mouth with the fleeting hope that it might be her sea-blue stone at last.

When high noon was blazing fiercely, Vivien was so utterly exhausted by the emotion of the search that she turned aside from the cruel road and stumbled up the burnished slope of Big Tor toward the flickering summit. Here she lay full length upon the turf where, pressing her face down into the minute tufts of eye-bright and thyme and flamy trefoil, she prayed the island to give her back the ring. And as she lay there it seemed to her that the earth refused her kisses. She sat up and stared out across the familiar landscape transumed by this terror from within, as if the island dead were upheaving from the ground, as if the elemental spirits of the place had risen to drain the virtue from the air and would stifle her. She seemed to be sinking down while with great green enveloping wings the island rose like a devil-fish above her. The effort to shake off this phantasy of horror left her in an immotionable panic. She tried to flee from these lancing rays of noon, to flee from this intolerable and parching stillness, to flee from these grey boulders that quivered and glinted as if beneath their stony simulacrum they seethed with wrath and would presently turn upon her like the monstrous reptiles of the past. What had been inanimate was now animate and what had been animate was now inanimate. The wild bees that came honeying to this bald green crest on which she sat fled swiftly away from the baneful air that overhung the wilderness of rushes and brambles and eglantine outspread below. The little blue butterflies that came to sip from the eyebright and the thyme hung from the stems, their powdered rose-pearled underwings

lifeless-seeming as spent blooms in the sun's dwale. And even as they Vivien was deprived of the power to leave this enchanted ground. Between her and the dark sea that was breaking in snow far out along the wide white beach northward stretched that great hollow of haunted waste land from which the stonechats and linnets, after poisoning themselves for a moment on a whinbush at the tor's edge, flew back inland, chirping and dipping to those weed-bright fields behind. Romare's Watchmen still dwarfed to the half of their former height effused a malice from their new squatness as if in depriving them of their gold the Knight of Roon had deprived them of their dignity and must look henceforth for treachery instead of faithful ward.

The Romares had offended against the dead, and the dead had claimed a life. The Romares had offended against the sun, and the sun would sear them even as he seared the grass. The Romares had offended against their own island, and the gold of which they had robbed it would be demanded again from them many times over.

Romare's daughter sprang to her feet. Her pale gold hair glinted like thistledown in the sun.

"Roon, Roon," she cried, "we are at your mercy. If you are tired of us drive us away. If you do not want to belong to Venetia and me one day, send some rich man who will buy you from my father. Let yourself be developed. Let yourself be turned into an object of interest in the neighbourhood. But you've no right to hate Venetia and me. You have no right to steal our gold, for we never stole from you. We would have given you everything; but if you do not want us we do not want you!"

The fetters of panic were loosed, and turning her head Vivien saw Sir Caleb Fuller's yacht sleek and large and white rapidly drawing near to the island. At the same instant she heard Venetia's voice calling to her from the road below:

"Vivien, the Cheshire Cat's coming over from Penzawn. Do let's go over to Carrackoon and hide till he goes away again."

When Vivien ran to join her little sister at the foot of Big Tor, she knew as she was sliding down the slippery turf that the spirits on the flickering summit were watching her with a smile.

"Did you find the locket?" Venetia asked.

"No, but I haven't searched the towans yet because I've lost Dick's ring, and I was looking for that."

Poor Venetia was as much dismayed by the loss of the ring as Vivien herself, and was on fire to begin another long search for that.

"It's no use," said Vivien, "I've looked everywhere. Besides, we can't stay here and perhaps meet the Cheshire Cat. I want to go over to Carrackoon. I hate Roon this morning," she added with defiance for those unjust spirits that were dancing in the sun on the crest of Big Tor.

"Suppose we meet the Cheshire Cat?" Venetia asked. "We'll get to the steps just as he's landing."

"We can put on our bathing dresses," Vivien said. "And then he'll look the other way. You know what a nice-minded man he is. Don't you remember how shocked he was when we bathed from the yacht?"

However, so swift was the yacht's approach, Sir Caleb Fuller had landed and arrived at the House before the girls by devious ways reached Rosevean steps.

"But anyway I think we will bathe," Vivien said. "So let's take the sweeps and pull the *Undine* over to the other side of Mab."

"Yes, we'll get up a good sweat that way," Venetia agreed. "And I like to feel fuggy before I bathe."

The *Undine* was a small but extremely solid sailing-boat which was chiefly used by Hamblyn for hauling up the lobster-pots. It would have been fun to go sailing in her far away from Sir Caleb Fuller; but there was no wind for an offing this morning.

"I suppose father will be shouting all over the island for us," said Venetia as, standing up in the *Undine*, the two girls pulled her very slowly past the *Butterfly*.

"Which looks more like a fat white caterpillar," said Vivien distastefully. This was unfair considering how much they had enjoyed their voyage home in the yacht. The tide was ebbing so that they were able to float out comfortably through the channel between the two islands; but it was very hard work to pull the *Undine* round the westerly point of Carrackoon across the stream. However, they managed it and reached the glassy blue waters in the shadow of black Mab.

Vivien had never in her life felt such a desire to take refuge in the sea.

"Let's ground the *Undine* on the beach between Mab and Carrackoon. We don't want to go back to Roon till the Cheshire Cat has gone, and anyway she'll float again by four o'clock."

This they did and at Vivien's suggestion scrambled round the rocky base of Mab to where on the south side it ran down to deep water in a smooth shelf. Here the girls stripped off their bathing-dresses and dived into the sea.

Vivien swam lazily with the slow tide, and as she swam the amorous water clung to her gleaming body and washed away the terror and the fever of that fierce noon. Burbling to her as she swam the sea declared his love and sprinkled her mouth with cool and easeful kisses. She swam round to the sunless side of Mab and clambering up to a rock as smooth as polished ebony she sat there with her legs dangling to watch her long white toes in a halo of pale blue fire where the dark water swirled round them. From where she was she could see the westerly cliffs of Roon shimmering rose-burnt in the sun; but she had no envy of them, listening here to the harps of the sea, for always from this rock on calm days at certain stages of the tide one heard these harps and looked for their white-armed players to rise from the water. She turned her eyes from the rose-burnt cliffs of Roon to where the young bracken of Carrackoon crimson-spired with lingering foxgloves glowed a welcome. Then plunging into the sea again she swam ashore and knelt naked on the beach.

"I love you, little island. Take me to your green heart and give me my heart's desire."

And casting her eyes down to hear the answer to her prayer Vivien saw stuck between two pebbles a golden signet ring. The crest was a chevalier in full armour galloping upon a horse—the crest of Romare himself—and none save a Romare could have dropped the ring upon this strand. It might have belonged to great-great-grandfather Morolt who loved Carrackoon and in the shade of whose chestnut trees his great-great-granddaughter had vowed her love. He might have dropped it here when landing with his spade and his saplings on some autumnal morning all those sleeping years ago. Carrackoon had treasured the ring until to-day it gave it back to be a blessing on her and on Dick and on their love. She would send this ring to Dick lest in jealousy Roon might steal it too. With this ring on his finger as a talisman Dick could not fail to gain Carrackoon, for the little island had plainly shown that it wanted him and her, wanted them to rule this small world and to rest here for ever in its peace.

"Little island, just as you have blessed me I bless you," Vivien murmured, and for the ring she picked up from the shore she left a tear or two.

Venetia came splashing out of the sea a few moments later.

"Oh, darling, how sweet you look standing there with nothing on. Vivien, you've found your ring!"

And when Venetia heard what ring it was she knew as surely as her sister that it was a bright omen of felicity.

"And now can't we go and sit like Sirens on the rocks off Merg?" she suggested.

"What on earth for?"

"Why, to sing to the Cheshire Cat, my dear, and lure him to his doom on the rocks as he sails back. Because really, you know, we don't want him to come bartering here every day, do we?"

But when that afternoon the *Undine* sailed into Roon harbour before the gentle breeze that had sprung up with the flood, the girls were met on the pier by the news that, though the *Butterfly* was gone back to Penzawn, Sir Caleb Fuller had been invited to stay at Romare's House.

26

THE CHESHIRE CAT

On the occasion of his first visit to Roon Sir Caleb Fuller was attended by a female familiar instead of the long-suffering Mr. Piddock. Not that he would have liked to hear Miss Upcott referred to as a familiar, which would have smacked too much of a relationship distasteful to his nice mind. In fact, he hastened to explain to Sir Morgan that though Miss Upcott was his confidential secretary he had taken the opportunity of his cruise round the Mediterranean to give her a well-deserved holiday.

"I always feel there's something a little uncomfortable in taking a lady about on what looks like a pleasure trip," he explained. "Of course, she always accompanied me to France during the war, but we all had to do our bit then and I don't think there was ever the smallest suggestion of anything unpleasant."

The Knight was most ready to accept Sir Caleb's assurances on this point after seeing Miss Upcott, who was a big-boned, close-eyed woman with sticky hair, a diffused grubbiness, and a slightly too ladylike manner of speech. He inquired what had become of Mr. Piddock.

Sir Caleb's moist eyes hardened for a moment.

"I had to get rid of Piddock. He was too lazy and incompetent for me."

The Knight, who was not particularly anxious that this bleak female should share her employer's first impressions of Roon, looked round for his daughters to take her off his hands, and he was annoyed to be informed by Hamblyn that Miss Vivien and Miss Venetia had gone out in the *Undine*. So there was nothing for it but to put up with Miss Upcott's company. She was by no means aggressive; but he felt that she was all the time following at Sir Caleb's heels like an intelligent and unkempt dog, ready to bite him if he showed the least inclination to get the better of her master.

However, Miss Upcott was not so dangerous as the Knight had feared, and her ladylike enthusiasm over the beauties of Roon made him feel quite optimistic over his chances of interesting the firework magnate more practically.

"Of course it would take a week and more than a week to explore the island thoroughly," he explained after lunch. "So I'm only going to give you the most superficial idea of the place. But it has a great charm, has it not?"

Sir Caleb beamed.

"I think it's beautiful. Isn't it beautiful, Miss Upcott?"

"Very beautiful, Sir Caleb."

"Miss Upcott sketches a little bit. Don't you, Miss Upcott?"

Miss Upcott giggled modestly.

"A very little bit, I'm afraid."

"Well, you'll have any amount of opportunities for sketching here," the Knight said.

But Miss Upcott did not respond to this. The blankness of her look expressed her utter inability to comprehend what Sir Morgan could possibly be meaning to suggest. She had no future outside Sir Caleb's, and it was not her place to peep forward into that.

After lunch the Knight took his guests to obtain a bird's-eye view from the top of Big Tor, led them indeed toward the very spot where Vivien a couple of hours ago had challenged the spirits of the island to produce these creatures of the present.

"What lovely flowers," Sir Caleb gushed in commendation of the weed-gay fields on either side of the road.

The Knight frowned.

"Very pleasant to look at, Fuller, but very bad farming. The difficulty of getting labour during the war made it impossible for me to keep up the land as it should have been kept up."

Sir Caleb considered the flowers severely. On realizing that they were nothing but a lot of idle vagabonds he decided that the glory

of their array was as scandalous as the silk stockings of the overpaid munition workers.

"Dreadful, isn't it, Miss Upcott?"

The secretary shook her head in mournful agreement.

"Still," Sir Caleb went on, pointing hopefully to a clump of hemlock in the ditch, "your cattle have got plenty to eat."

The Knight was on the verge of bewailing the effect on the pasturage of two unpropitious seasons when he recollected that it was impolitic to disparage the resources of the island.

"Yes, there's plenty of feed, though the particular plant you're admiring happens to be poisonous."

"Oh dear," Sir Caleb exclaimed, moving away from that side of the road. "Be careful, Miss Upcott."

She smiled her gratitude for the warning and emphasized her prudence by gathering a dowdy skirt round her muscular thighs.

"Are there any snakes on Roon?" Sir Caleb inquired.

The Knight shook his head.

"None. I thought of introducing rattlesnakes once when the trippers were becoming very tiresome by landing without permission, but if my project for developing the island materializes I shall be glad I never did."

"I should think so," said Sir Caleb with a shudder.

John Holt came pounding along the road just then with a bright apprehensive eye cocked at the visitors over his big hooked nose. He dabbed at his forelock energetically, and gave them good morrow as he passed.

"What a dear man," Sir Caleb murmured sentimentally. "I suppose he's a pensioner?"

The Knight guffawed, and explained Holt's important status on Roon.

"Dear me, I would have thought he was too old to be useful any longer," Sir Caleb said. "We never employ old men at making fireworks." And it was left to the recipient of this information to find out whether such solicitude was on account of the age of the old men or the quality of the fireworks.

They reached the place where one turned aside from the road by a line of stone troughs to surmount the slopes of Big Tor.

"We ought to have put on our yachting shoes, Miss Upcott, oughtn't we?" said Sir Caleb, who looked as if he were working a treadmill, so slippery was the turf. "You'd better go down on your hands and . . ." he stopped and substituted "on all fours." It

might embarrass Miss Upcott to allude to her knees, he evidently decided.

At last with help from the Knight's tiger-wood cane the visitor stood on the summit of Big Tor. He gazed earnestly at the large view spread out at his feet, and it at once aroused all the noblest feelings of his nature.

"Every man has dreamed of something like this," he avowed solemnly. "Though I've never had much time for dreaming in my busy life," he added with a sigh. "But any little dreams I've ever had have always been of retiring from the world to some beautiful spot like this. I want my boy to enjoy the advantages I never had."

The Knight froze for a moment; but he recovered himself and began to point out the features of the landscape, to which exposition Sir Caleb listened with an attentive smile but inattentive eyes.

"Do you know what I was thinking, Sir Morgan?" he said at last, his cheeks dimpling with cherubic roguishness, his tone arch as that of a schoolgirl who believes that a middle-aged bachelor has fallen a victim to her charms. "I was thinking what a wonderful golf-course you could have here."

A year ago the Knight would have felt inclined to fling anybody who suggested such an abomination over the edge of the Tor; but to-day with his project for making money out of the island he agreed warmly with the suggestion:

"As good a golf-course as you'd get anywhere."

"Wonderful," Sir Caleb murmured dreamily.

"Such delightful views," the Knight continued. "They would make the idiotic game an almost rational amusement."

"I rather like golf, Sir Morgan," said Sir Caleb as if he were confessing to his host a private naughtiness that he would never have revealed to anybody else on earth.

"I don't know anything about it myself," said the Knight. "But it looks an idiotic game. A kind of elaborate marbles as far as I can make out. However, as I say, the surroundings would be so delightful here that the game could hardly spoil them. Of course, the towans are looking their best to-day with the roses all in bloom."

"Roses?" echoed Sir Caleb, whose idea of a rose was a small cabbage very definitely pink or red which responded obsequiously to the patronage of his nose by offering an effluence of perfume richer than his own hairwash. "Roses? Where are the roses?"

"Why, the towans are covered with them," said the Knight, indicating with a sweep of his arm the starry ground below.

"Those little white dots?" Sir Caleb asked in a disparaging tone. "I'm afraid they'd be rather a nuisance when we were looking for our balls. I'm afraid we would have to get rid of them from the fairway, wouldn't we, Miss Upcott?"

"I'm afraid so, Sir Caleb," that bleak female agreed, pursing her thin lips.

The Knight, quite ready to sacrifice his roses if by doing so he could plant this mushroom in their stead, went on to expatiate in detail on the possibilities of Roon, on the teas and lunches that were to be served, on the profit from selling their own lobsters and prawns. . . .

"Prawns?" Sir Caleb interposed in an awestruck voice. "Do you get prawns here?"

"Hundreds," the Knight averred.

The magnate turned to his secretary.

"Prawns, Miss Upcott," he whispered.

"Yes, Sir Caleb, I heard. Quite exciting."

"And one could catch prawns oneself," he continued meditatively, "which would save the fisherman's time. At least I think prawns don't ever live very far out, do they, Sir Morgan?"

He might have been obtaining the address of somebody whose terrace was within five minutes of a tube-station.

"You'll be able to catch all you can eat round Roon," the Knight assured him. "Another idea was to have bathing-tents along the north beach."

"For the use of which of course you would make a charge," said Sir Caleb quickly. "Besides, it would be more comfortable if visitors didn't undress on the beach. It's so easy to give a place an unpleasant name. I know that nowadays lots of people do undress on beaches, but I'm a tiny little bit old-fashioned. I was brought up in a very religious atmosphere, and though I'm no longer religious in the conventional way—well, I think the advance of science has done away with so much and I would never blame anybody for not believing in the divinity of Christ—still I don't like the idea of undressing on an open beach. We can so easily go too far in that kind of thing."

The Knight was silent.

"I expect you think I'm very funny and old-fashioned?" said Sir Caleb humbly.

Actually the Knight was wondering if all the money on earth justified him in handing over Roon to this greasy puritan; but he

checked his impulse to bid him get off the island and back to his squibs. After all, the surface to which gold stuck had to be a bit unpleasant.

"Then if one made this golf-course," he went on, "it might be advisable to build a hotel—provided of course that the necessary capital were forthcoming."

Sir Caleb had a far away expression in his eyes which the Knight hoped signified the contemplation of his own idle resources. Presently the visitor turned to his secretary.

"Excuse me a moment, Miss Upcott."

He took his host aside so mysteriously that the Knight fancied he was there and then going to make a solid proposal.

"I was thinking that there was another little way you might make a small profit." His voice sank to a whisper. "I was thinking, Sir Morgan, that you might erect one or two little cloak-rooms about the island, and of course make a small charge for the convenience." He raised his voice again. "I was going to tell Sir Morgan, Miss Upcott, that it would be rather fun to have an automatic weighing-machine on the pier. And you know, Sir Morgan, you can often buy little things like that quite cheaply from bankrupt stock."

After tea the Knight handed Miss Upcott over to his daughters, enjoining them to do all they could to make the island attractive to her. They stared at their father as if he had asked them to show off Roon to a sack of coals. Then they sized up Miss Upcott's physical endurance, winked at each other, and proceeded to drag her round the rocky western shore from Rosevean Point to Greenwater Cove, by the time she reached which Miss Upcott was more ready for bed than for dinner. Meanwhile, the Knight led Sir Caleb Fuller directly to the cove that for everybody who saw it summed up in perfect miniature the diverse beauties of Roon. Here they both sat down on the sloping beach that glinted like aventurine in the light of the westering sun.

"Different from the shells you're accustomed to, Fuller," said the Knight, attempting a rather heavy joke in the hope of putting his guest on the road to talk about real business.

"Yes, indeed," said Sir Caleb gravely. "It was a great wrench for me when I felt bound to offer the government the use of our factory for making munitions. Still I do always feel a tiny little bit proud that we were the first firm to come forward. And though the country has recognised any little services that my patriotism enabled me to render by creating me a baronet, lost a very great deal by the war."

The Knight wriggled, if that verb may be applied to the angular motions of his form on hearing his guest speak thus.

"Yet I dare say you did pretty well out of munitions, eh?"

Sir Caleb shook mournfully his snow-white curls.

"Oh no, I lost a great deal more than I made. People have such terribly exhausted ideas about the money made during the war by business men who gave up everything to help the country with their experience. Do you know, wherever I went with my yacht a disgraceful rumour went round every port that I was a millionaire! Before I had the pleasure of meeting you, we heard that coal could be obtained half a peseta cheaper per ton in Valencia than at Algeciras, and when we put in there they raised the price five pesetas for me! As soon as you deal with Roman Catholic nations you come up against dishonesty."

"I'm a Papist myself, you know," said the Knight, smiling. "So beware of me in business."

Sir Caleb was overcome by confusion at his tactless remark.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!"

"Don't apologize. Papistry has survived a lot of criticism."

"Yes, but I think I ought to explain that I did not make that remark as a Protestant. I'm not an orthodox Christian even."

The Knight tried not to yawn.

"Ever since I've had a little time for reading really serious books I've gone in a bit for theosophy. Have you ever read Madame Blavatsky's book *Isis Unveiled*?"

The Knight shook his head.

"You're more used to letting off sky-rockets than I am, Fuller. Roman candles too for that matter."

"I wish you would read it, Sir Morgan. I was so much upset when my poor wife died, and I derived such a lot of help from that book. It has given me a tiny little glimpse into the Great Beyond."

The Knight began to fidget again.

"Of course, on this beautiful island of yours, Sir Morgan, you've escaped the wear and tear of existence. You wouldn't think to look at me that I was only fifty-one years old. And my hair as you see is quite white. The doctor was so worried about me. I think he suspected I had a heart. So instead of playing golf so much since I came back I've taken to jigsaw puzzles. I obtain them second-hand quite cheaply with just two or three pieces missing, which makes it a little more sporting. I'm telling you about myself like

this, Sir Morgan, because I've been wanting to make a tiny little suggestion to you about your island."

The host pulled himself together brightly.

"If you think I'm being impertinent, please stop me," Sir Caleb went on in a gentle voice.

"Not at all. Not at all."

"Thank you," he breathed humbly. "Well, it struck me that perhaps as you were anxious to develop this lovely little island of yours you might care to consider some kind of a business proposition. Have you ever tried to estimate what it is really worth?"

"I really don't know what it would be worth," said the Knight. "But I should imagine somewhere round about £25,000. Of course with everything on it it would be worth a very great deal more. I wouldn't accept anything less than—than—than—well, about £100,000 I suppose."

The Knight looked up under his eyes to see if the prospective purchaser winced at hearing such a sum named; when he observed with what equanimity he heard it, he wished that he had made the figure a good deal larger.

"Yes, well, of course," said Sir Caleb in his dreamiest voice, "it might be advisable to call in valuers for the contents. I don't possess a great knowledge of old furniture, though occasionally I manage to pick up a little bargain. Still, I don't set myself up as a connoisseur," he beamed, "and I might easily get done," he added with a wide-eyed look of roguish dismay.

"I should be prepared to call in valuers," said the Knight. "I may easily have underestimated the value of my furniture."

"What pretty little shells these are," Sir Caleb went on remotely. "You might make a little money out of the visitors by putting them in muslin bags with pink and pale blue ribbons and selling them for souvenirs. I daresay your daughters would enjoy collecting such pretty things in their spare time and dividing them up artistically into different colours. Why, you might almost charge threepence a bag!"

The Knight was rather depressed by the conversation's abrupt descent from £100,000 to threepenny bags of shells, from the sale of which not even his expansive optimism over figures could juggle a sum of the least significance.

"Suppose that you decided to make me an offer for Roon?" he asked. "Might I count on such an offer being made fairly soon?"

"Oh, I make up my mind very quickly indeed," said Sir Caleb. "I'm famous for that. In fact I was going to suggest that you

should come and pay me a little visit at home in a fortnight's time. I shall have had time by then to consider things a little bit more carefully, and I could explain my financial position to you quite frankly."

When the girls reached Greenwater Cove with Miss Upcott, who by that time looked like a piece of wreckage they had picked up on the beach, nothing remained of this conversation except the little mound of shells which Sir Caleb gradually heaped beside him and the advancing and retreating footsteps of himself and his host up and down the beach that was warm-hued now as a tea-rose in the declining sun.

The Knight said nothing to his daughters about the proposed visit to Sir Caleb Fuller until a couple of days before he left. Their consternation was acute. That their father, who never went to stay anywhere away from Roon unless in a big continental hotel, should elect to make an exception in favour of the Cheshire Cat oppressed them with melancholy prognostications. It was only now that Vivien confided in her sister the immediate and startling result of her challenge to the spirits of the island.

"And I never saw a single fairy on Midsummer Eve," Venetia admitted. "I thought it was because I was growing up. But I suppose it was because they knew the Cheshire Cat was coming. What do you think Father is going to do, Vivien?"

"He might be going to do anything," said Vivien gloomily. "The Cheshire Cat may have offered to buy the island. I'm sure he's thinking of doing so. Don't you remember the way Miss Upcott kept asking all sorts of inquisitive questions about the way we managed our boat-service and where we bought our groceries in Penzawn?"

"Well, we must just hope for the best," Venetia sighed. "Only five savages came over this afternoon."

"The brutes," her sister murmured.

These savages and brutes were five Penzawn visitors who had taken advantage of the calm sea to make the voyage over to Roon and enjoy its beauty at a shilling a head. But then, as Tom Bell said hopefully to the Knight and as Holt said hopelessly to the girls, the season of visitors had not really begun yet.

"They'll be here so thick as frogs come August month," the old man groaned. "Leaving gates open, trampling down the barley, dropping broken bottles for the cows to cut themselves on. Bah! 'tis the worst thing Sir Morgan ever done in his life."

27

BILKTON TOWERS

Some twelve years before this date Caleb Fuller had found that the gaunt house built by his grandfather on the outskirts of Brigham in Cheshire was, owing to the rapid development of the grimy little town, no longer a pleasant or dignified residence for the head of the great firework firm that provided the chief of Brigham's many industries. So, during one of his mayoralities, he presented Lebanon House to the borough as an asylum that might be able to cope with the increase of local lunatics since Brigham had swelled from a market town to an industrial centre. He selected as the site for his new house a hill in the parish of Lower Bilkton, a commonplace stretch of country about fifteen miles from his native town. Lebanon House had been an ugly square stucco box of a place surrounded by a quantity of melancholy conifers. Bilkton Towers was a Gothic residence surrounded by variegated deciduous trees, whose golden and silver foliage afforded their owner the greatest æsthetic satisfaction in spite of the way it shirked the unpleasantness of a Cheshire winter by strewing the ground every autumn. When it was first built Bilkton Towers had resembled a commodious parish hall. Several architectural additions culminating in a whole new wing lately built on to celebrate the owner's baronetcy had by now given it the appearance of a parish church with hall and schools and vestries attached. Except for the very latest addition it already looked as venerable as a young man who goes to a suburban fancy-dress ball disguised with a beard and whiskers. This picturesque senescence had been achieved by covering it with the oily green leaves of that hideous vegetable arriviste *Ampelopsis Veitchii*, which would in September turn to an equally oily red until at last they fell and gave the house, if not the venerable aspect it possessed in Summer, at any rate an unshaven look that prevented the complexion of the young bricks from being too conspicuously out of keeping with the Early English style of the architecture. Among the atrocities of bastard Gothic, of which Balliol College, Oxford, may be cited as a familiar specimen, Bilkton Towers would always have claims to be considered one of the most atrocious. If externally the house seemed a more appropriate abode for an ecclesiastical commissioner

than for a firework magnate who, with a host of other profiteers, had scrambled up on the broad shoulders of patriotism to grab at the rank to which his wealth entitled him, internally it was a model of what such recent grandeur ought to be. And for this perfection of taste Sir Caleb Fuller had to thank the infallible young man from Messrs. Garing and Willow who had, as he put it, aimed not only at making every room "rather unique," but also at securing an accurate example of every style and period. "You do not want to make the common mistake of jumbling up the eighteenth century with the seventeenth, Sir Caleb," he had said austere.

The magnate, who was most anxious not to make any kind of mistake, least of all a common one, agreed perhaps a little sadly as he thought of what all this accuracy was going to cost. However, a baronet he had become, and a baronet he must be. If the billiard-table was Hepplewhite, why, then it would give him a feeling of social security to know that the cues were Hepplewhite too. If the dining-room table was Jacobean, his guests should never have to shudder at a Georgian sideboard. If the bath was Roman, he felt happy to think that nobody was likely to be shocked at finding he had to wash his hands in a Minoan lavatory-basin or snatch his towel from a Mycenaean rack. The lawns outside might lack the authentic velvet of four hundred years' careful mowing, but he would have done all that an April-baronet should to lay down carpets indoors whose pile should be beyond criticism.

It is tempting to accompany Sir Caleb Fuller as he leads the Knight of Roon like a captive ghost round his house, to watch him demonstrate, by turning various taps, with what admirable neatness the same water that makes his own morning tea provides warmth for the hands of the hall-boy, to hear him play with the help of electricity and perforated rolls sentimental strains of Mendelssohn on his organ, to explore even the ultimate larder and learn how much it costs him every week to keep New Zealand mutton from thawing prematurely; but a mere enumeration of all the conveniences that a rich man may acquire in these days would fill a book.

The Knight of Roon, in the hope of adding himself to the list of Sir Caleb's acquisitions, did his best to display an intelligent interest in everything he was shown. He admired with equal enthusiasm the device by which a scullery-maid at Bilkton Towers could dry twenty plates at the same rate as a scullery-maid less luxuriously equipped could dry one, and the installation for diffusing artificial

ozone in Sir Caleb's bedroom. It should be observed that beyond the artificial ozone there was no luxury antediluvian, diluvian, or postdiluvian in this bedroom. The infallible young man from Messrs. Garing and Willow had been stopped on the threshold of this cell. He had not been allowed to say, "I perfectly understand, Sir Caleb; you wish simplicity to be the dominant note," and forthwith taken it upon himself to bed his patron simply at three times what it would cost him to give the guests Tudor dreams or Chippendale repose. The single bedstead was of brass and iron; the washstand was as ugly and solid as a cheesemonger's counter; the floor was laid with a cheap Brussels carpet; the curtains were of old brown rep; the wallpaper, though it might look like an unweeded fragment of Eden after a hoar frost, had not cost a tenth of the peacocks and parrots and birds of paradise in the guest-rooms.

"It's a homely little room, isn't it?" said Sir Caleb, with an affectionate sigh. And one felt that this affection was due as much as anything to the owner's wakeful hours not being haunted here by the spirits of murdered sovereigns and misspent shillings.

There were only three pictures on the lush walls. The first of these—a chromolithograph—represented a family of four Persian kittens peeping out of a top-hat, into which receptacle they had apparently been placed by a little girl with a pink sash, for underneath the group was inscribed, *Won't my daddy be suppwised?* The second represented a young man in Regency costume on one side of a stile gazing at a high-waisted young woman on the other side, both apparently in a sate of extreme dejection. The legend underneath said *An April Shower*. The third—a coloured print opposite Sir Caleb's widowed bed—represented a lady with nothing on seated pensively on the hearthrug in front of a fire, the rich curves of her form coloured a rutilant orange by the flames.

"Your ideal of the female form divine, Fuller?" the Knight asked with a smile, observing that his host was gazing with a hint of surreptitiousness at this last picture.

"Oh no," said Sir Caleb quickly. "I bought it owing to a little mistake, and I didn't quite like to hang it *anywhere*. So I put it in my own room. Of course, it's very clever, and I dare say you'll think me funny and old-fashioned, but I always wish that artists wouldn't treat these subjects. This is my sleeping-porch."

He hastily led his visitor out to a roofed-in balcony. "I would sleep out here always," he sighed, "if the naughty little birds didn't make such a dreadful noise in the morning."

On their way down the great central staircase the Knight inquired if the stuffed heads of various big game that adorned the walls were the trophies of his host's gun.

"Oh no," Sir Caleb answered reproachfully. "I only bought them. I don't like killing anything."

"You killed a good many things with your shells," the Knight reminded him.

"Ah yes, but that was for my country," Sir Caleb explained gravely. "But I've never fired a gun myself. Our firm suffered terribly from German competition before the war; but I don't believe I could have killed even a German. I assure you that I suffered a great deal for my patriotism. I'll tell you a little story to give you an instance of what some of us had to put up with during the war. You know of course that I held an important post at the Ministry of Armament? Well, one day Lord Ben Lomond sent for me, and said: 'Mr. Fuller'—I was still Mr. Fuller then—'Mr. Fuller,' he said, 'here's a cheque for two million pounds. I want you to go over to America and buy——' Well, I won't bore you with the details, but I was to buy various munitions the country badly needed. Well, when I arrived in America I gave an order for a million and a half to one firm. But do you know, when I asked about my commission, which according to business should have been £150,000, Mr. Ira Lammam, the president of the company, flatly refused to give it to me. Yet I'd known Mr. Lammam for years and dealt with him long before the war, so that I was actually being robbed by a friend. I tried to make him see what a dreadful thing he was doing, but the war seemed to have changed his whole point of view. He said, 'Well, Mr. Fuller, as far as we're concerned you can give us the order or not just as you like. We've plenty of work on hand, and if we've got to pay you a commission, we're sorry, but there's nothing doing, and you can take your order elsewhere.' In the ordinary course of business I would have walked out of the room if Mr. Lammam had spoken to me like that. But knowing how badly the country needed the munitions I put my own feelings on one side. Mr. Lammam and I used to be great friends. In fact, whenever he came to England he always spent a week at Bilkton. But since then we've never spoken. I'm very thankful that Mrs. Fuller—she died before I was made a baronet, so of course she's still Mrs. Fuller—yes, I'm thankful my dear wife didn't live to hear of the way Mr. Lammam treated me, because I'm sure it would have broken her heart."

While his host was telling this story, the notion passed through the Knight's mind that somehow Sir Caleb was going to get back from the world that lost £150,000, and he had a moment's uneasiness whether he might not himself be intended to contribute some of it. He wished that this fellow would hurry up and announce his proposals. The Knight knew that it was not good business to appear to be too eager; but after he had been at Bilkton three days without a word being said about Roon he felt that he must do something to bring the subject forward.

"Well, Fuller," he began at dinner on the third night. "I've been very comfortable here and all that, but I must be getting back, you know?"

The host looked sad.

"Oh, must you?" he sighed.

With a nervous glance at the butler he told him that Sir Morgan's glass was empty. He hated making suggestions to Vernon, who was actually a second-rate manservant of somewhat seedy exterior, but who loomed upon his master's vision as the incarnation of a cynical prodigality. He resented his inability to give this lazy brute an order, as he knew how to give orders down at the factory and make everybody tremble for his place. This butler was the worst thing about his baronetcy, and he could never look at the red hand in his armorial bearings without thinking of Vernon.

"I don't like to be too long away from the island just when I'm making this experiment with trippers," the Knight continued, after taking a sip at the champagne in his replenished glass.

Sir Caleb smiled sympathetically; but he gave no sign of supposing that his guest's business at home had anything to do with himself.

"So that perhaps we might talk over that matter we discussed the other day?"

Sir Caleb looked vague.

"What matter, Sir Morgan?"

"Why, the disposal of Roon."

His host put a finger to his lips and indicated with an awestruck nod the presence of Vernon. The Knight drummed the table; but he had no receipt of conduct for dealing with a fellow like this, and he supposed he had either to put up with it, or forgo the chance of striking the bargain.

"Yes, I must get back as soon as possible," he said impatiently. "I want to see that all is going well, and then I'm off to Aix for a month or so."

Sir Caleb smiled encouragingly ; but he said nothing about Roon, and even after dinner when he and his guest were seated in the library over coffee he made no allusion to the island.

The bookcases in Sir Caleb Fuller's library had been thrust upon him by the infallible young man from Garing and Willow's ; but the books themselves had been collected by their owner. The system on which he had bought them was a happy combination of the outward appearance of the volumes with the relative quantity of material embedded in all this gilt to the cheapness at which it was offered. The country that produces canned literature on the largest and most gorgeous scale is the United States. Consequently to the United States Sir Caleb had gone for his collection. There were the five hundred best short stories of the world in fifteen volumes, there was the life of Benjamin Franklin in nine volumes, there were ten minutes with every famous author from Homer to O. Henry in twenty-two volumes, and there was the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the volumes of which printed on India paper with limp green leather covers supported one another like a squad of drunken riflemen. In case the books should want to escape, the young man from Garing and Willow's had penned them in behind brass wire ; and by an ingenious device when Sir Caleb shut the door of his library behind him all the books were automatically locked in at the same time. In order that this door should not detract from the symmetry of the shelves it appeared when shut like a bookcase itself, and here some of the noblest works of man were to be found—or rather their dummy backs were to be found—stuck on the door.

"It makes it very costly, doesn't it?" said Sir Caleb, who obviously supposed that by sitting in a room from which the only apparent method of escape was either by throwing yourself out of the window or by climbing up the chimney an extra luxury was added to a scholar's existence.

"You're a great book-buyer, I see," the Knight had observed.

"Yes, but I haven't got to buy any more," Sir Caleb had replied with a sigh of relief. "My shelves are *quite* full now."

Sir Morgan looked round at these gaudy flat-backed books in their cages, and decided that whether this firework fellow talked business or not he could not spend another day in his house. Imprudent or not, he must bring him to the point this evening. He drained his brandy purposefully.

"Well, Fuller. What about it?"

"What about what, Sir Morgan?"

"Why, the island."

"Oh, I've been thinking things over and going into my financial position very carefully and, you know, I'm afraid it's rather beyond my means."

The Knight looked as much staggered as he felt when he heard this, but the elusive magnate went off into a string of excuses before he could say anything.

"You see, I have the yacht on my hands for one thing. The specialist thought it so important I should go for a cruise at once that I had not time to look round for a reasonable vessel, and I'm afraid I paid too much for it." He made this revelation of weakness in a tone that seemed to beg for mercy upon a poor innocent. "Even if I sell it, I'm afraid I shall have to face a heavy loss. I'm afraid people who sell motorcars and yachts aren't always quite so straight in their dealings as they ought to be." But lest the Knight should fancy that the dishonesty of transport's middlemen was the only thing that stood between him and Roon, he provided more difficulties. "If I took Roon, what *would* I do with this house? I've just spent such a dreadful amount of money on it, and though I'm retiring from active work in the firm on account of my heart, still here I am, and my advice would always be useful to them. This abominable excess-profit tax has crippled me dreadfully, because I had to invest most of my money abroad, and it might be difficult for me to realize just when I would like to. So, I'm afraid your lovely little island can only be a beautiful dream."

Sir Caleb smiled sadly as he wrapped up in the same mourning-band his own ideals and the ambitions of his guest.

"I rather wish you'd let me know all this before you brought me up here," said the Knight gruffly.

"Oh, I'm so distressed to hear you say that," Sir Caleb murmured.

"I hoped I was going to have the pleasure of introducing my boy Norman to you, but unfortunately he's staying with a college friend this week. He's twenty-four and he went right through the war from 1916. He was in the R.N.V.R., but of course he never went to sea. He was too useful where he was. He was longing to go to sea, but they simply wouldn't *let* him go. He had a most interesting job. He was working with the Commission for National Economy, and he was travelling all over England seeing that people didn't throw away their empty tins and cans. He was made an M.B.E.

and Lord Lochlomond said that he saved more tins for the government than anybody. I was very proud of him."

The Knight clicked his fingers irritably.

"Would you like some more brandy?" Sir Caleb inquired anxiously.

"No; I was wondering if you had a Bradshaw?"

"Oh, you're not really going to leave the Towers to-morrow?"

"Yes, yes. I must get back."

"Oh dear, and I'm afraid you're a tiny little bit disappointed about your island. I wish I could do something. I've conceived such a great personal liking for you, Sir Morgan, if I may say so. I do want to do anything I possibly can not to disappoint you in any way. I wonder what I could do? Of course, I might be able to manage some kind of partnership. But perhaps you wouldn't entertain such an idea?"

"Yes, I would," said the Knight quickly.

"Would you? Oh, well, then in that case I feel sure that something could be managed. Let me see. Oh, I'm so glad I suggested this way out. You must let me have a night to think over what I can do. You'll stay a day or two longer?"

"No, I must get back to-morrow," Sir Morgan insisted firmly.

"Oh dear! Well, then we must try to hammer out something to-night. Let me see. Well, I can't make up my mind absolutely yet, but—didn't you say you were going abroad for a month or two?"

Sir Morgan nodded.

"Well, I wonder—no, I hardly like to make such a suggestion—and yet—well, I will." He beamed radiantly at his own audacity. "Suppose you let me go and stay on Roon at that dear little inn? I'd want to have Miss Upcott with me, and perhaps you wouldn't mind if Norman came? Of course, I dare say you wouldn't like me to pay any rent for our rooms, but naturally we would pay for our board. Oh, no, thank you *very* much, but I'd *rather* do that than stay in your house, if you don't mind. We wouldn't feel quite such intruders. Then *when* you come back from Aix I'll let you know definitely what I can do. And when I go up to bed to-night I'll draw up a provisional agreement which I'm sure Miss Upcott will type out for us. I'm a very poor sleeper, so you mustn't think I shall be doing anything unusual by working out our little plan at night."

In the morning Sir Caleb with his most earnest smile showed the Knight the typewritten result of his nocturnal cogitation;

SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING ROON

Sir M.R. = Sir Morgan Romare, Bart.
F. = Sir Caleb Fuller, Bart.

Sir M.R. is willing that F. shall acquire a one-half interest in his property of and at Roon on the following basis:

The value of the property shall be ascertained by a valuer to be mutually agreed who shall value in accordance with instructions to be mutually agreed, all property belonging to Sir M.R. excepting personal property and furniture or any other property which shall be expressly excluded by Sir M.R.

Sir M.R. will instruct his Agent at Roon to allow F. to make any reasonable investigation as to the value of the said property and to make thorough inspection of everything appertaining thereto, and for this purpose to live on the Island at the Old Inn for a period not exceeding eight weeks without charge for rent but in all other respects expenses of such residence to be borne by F. F. may include in such residence one member of his family and his secretary, if desired.

After such examination, inspection and residence F. shall inform Sir M.R. whether he desires to acquire the interest aforesaid. This decision shall be given not later than . . .

"Now what date shall we put?" Sir Caleb asked. "That's rather for you to say, Sir Morgan."

The Knight thought for a moment.

"Better put September 30th. I'll come home from Aix by the middle of the month."

Sir Caleb pencilled in the date and proceeded to read the rest of the document:

On the assumption that F. desires to acquire the said interest the formalities of such acquisition shall be as follows:

1. A Limited Liability Company shall be formed and Sir M.R. shall assign to the said company the said property in accordance with the valuer's schedule. The Company shall pay Sir. M.R. for such assignment the sum of blank pounds being the said sum of blank pounds in consideration of the ascertained valuation total, by the issue of fully-paid shares for the requisite sum. F. shall undertake to purchase half of the said shares from Sir M.R. at par for cash. No shares shall be issued to any other party or for any other consideration excepting with the approval of both Sir M.R. and F.

2. A sum of blank pounds shall be provided as working capital by Sir M.R. and F. Each subscribing at par for blank shares of the Company.

3. Any part of the premises or property of the Company occupied or used for the personal benefit of either Sir M.R. or F. shall be rented or purchased personally by Sir M.R. and F. and the proceeds shall belong to the Company. The amount of such rent or purchase shall be mutually agreed between Sir M.R. and F.

The management of the Company shall be in the hands of Sir M.R. and F., who shall mutually agree on all matters of principle as to the carrying out thereof in detail.

Sir Caleb concluded the reading of this document with a sigh that seemed to indicate an all too poignant awareness of his own reckless generosity.

"Of course you quite understand, Sir Morgan," he said, "that this merely provides a basis for the transaction? Neither of us is committed to anything by this."

"I'm committed to lodging you at the Old Inn for a couple of months," the Knight pointed out with a laugh.

"Oh yes," Sir Caleb agreed. "But if you don't like that idea . . ."

"I don't mind it in the least," the Knight said quickly.

Sir Caleb beamed.

"And I dare say we won't ever avail ourselves of the lodging you so kindly agree to our having, because unless I get an offer for the *Butterfly* I intend to bring her to Penzawn. So Norman and I and Miss Upcott will probably be living on board. There are one or two friends I might want to ask down to help me with my decision, and though I fully expect that they will be lodged on board, still I dare say you wouldn't mind my asking for rooms for them in the Old Inn if by any chance I did manage to sell the *Butterfly*. I know you'd like me to sell the *Butterfly*, because it will relieve me of a great deal of financial strain and help so much over Roon. There's one friend I want to ask down to see if there's any chance of using the tides round the island for providing electric power. We will have to think about that, you know."

All that the Knight had to think about was relief from the financial strain that was threatening to break him, and if Sir Caleb Fuller had proposed to consult Mephistopheles about the potentialities of Roon he would have lodged him with pleasure.

At the railway station while they were waiting for the London train Sir Caleb took him aside.

"Sir Morgan, I hope you won't think I'm presuming on the short time I have had the very great pleasure of knowing you, but I do

want to assure you once more how much I have learned to value this friendship; and, if I may say so without intruding too much on your privacy, I want to tell you that I like you so much and that I am so anxious to do everything for you I possibly can that I can't help feeling a little bit worried, because I realize that you are feeling the changed conditions brought about by the war. Sir Morgan, I like you so much that, whether I manage to help you by assuming half the burden of Roon or not, you've only to ask me and I'm ready to lend you a thousand pounds at any time. Please forgive me if I've offended you by saying this."

Sir Morgan was moved by this practical assurance of good will. He shook Sir Caleb's hand with what for him was exceptional warmth.

"That's uncommonly kind of you, Fuller. I appreciate your offer more than I can say. At this moment I can carry on quite comfortably, but I shan't forget your kindness, Fuller."

"At any time, Sir Morgan," Sir Caleb assured him with an added cordiality from the fact that he was not going to be asked to take out his cheque-book on the platform.

"Thanks very much, oh . . . and—er—Fuller, don't keep calling me Sir Morgan. If we're going to be partners it sounds rather ridiculous."

The train came in, and Sir Caleb stood by the window of the compartment, beaming in at his departing guest with an expression of such devouring benevolence that the Knight grew quite hot under it.

"Still," he said to himself, as he settled back to read his paper and Bilkton Junction receded from the train, "there's a lot of good in that fellow. He'll be a most dreadful bore on Roon, but I dare say I shall be able to spend most of my time abroad while he grubs round after the money."

Before the Knight departed to Aix-les-Bains, where he felt convinced that he should recoup himself for his losses at Monte Carlo in the Spring, he told his daughters that he relied upon their loyalty to do everything in their power to make Roon attractive to Sir Caleb Fuller.

"It is idle," he said, "to argue that we do not want people like him on the island. I quite agree with all your objections to the man. But he has treated me very handsomely, and I want to show him that we appreciate his attitude. It is surely better to keep Roon for the Romares with the help of somebody like Fuller than

to sell it and take ourselves off for ever? I am as much aware of his objectionableness as you are. But if I can sacrifice my personal feelings for the good of our island, so can you."

He paused to give Vivien and Venetia an opportunity of associating themselves with their father in the sacrifice of all predilections, and he found the chill silence with which they received his words most irritating.

"Damn it," he exploded, "do for heaven's sake get it into your stupid little heads that we've got to hook this firework fellow."

There was no reply from either.

"I tell you this," the Knight threatened angrily. "If I lose Fuller through your behaviour I'll go and settle down with both of you in Earls Court for the rest of my life."

Venetia asked where that was, and her father, restraining himself with some difficulty from boxing her ears, stalked out in search of Tom Bell, whose petrified attention to his lecture on the necessity of doing everything for the next few weeks to fire Sir Caleb Fuller with such a passion for Roon as would lead him to offer any money that was required to keep the island going and Romare in Romare's House consoled him for his daughters' intransigence.

"Anything he wants, Tom Bell, see that he gets. He likes this game golf. Don't I understand that you used to play it during the war? Very well. Play with him if you find it amuses him to be played with. Ask his advice about entertaining these confounded trippers. Nothing pleases men like Sir Caleb Fuller so much as being asked for their advice. It costs them nothing and warms up their importance. Anything he wants to know about the wages and the way we run things tell him. Don't let Holt be mulish. Make Hamblyn and Sam Hockin behave themselves. Jervis will probably be sensible. But it's you I rely on, Tom Bell."

That night Sir Morgan resolved to make a final effort to win his elder daughter round to his point of view. After dinner he asked her to come and sit with him for a while in the library. Although it was not yet within a week of July's end the evening was damp and chilly, so that a fire was burning in one of the big grates and the dim room was full of quivering shadows. Vivien sat upright in that very chair in which Dick had sat so uncomfortably seven months ago when he came to sue for her hand. Her father was deep in the big leather-covered arm-chair beside the fire.

"Vivien, I don't often make appeals to people, least of all to my own daughters," the Knight began at once. "In fact, I never

remember appealing to anybody in my life, but . . .” He paused a moment, and seemed to be attempting to drown his pride in the glass of port he was drinking. Then he resumed. “There must be something of myself in you, and you ought to be able to understand me better than a Tom Bell. I know that you intensely dislike the idea of having this fellow Fuller here. I dislike it myself no less. But my position is grave. I have a right to assume that you will accept my word for that statement, and not suppose that I am using a mere figure of speech. You will admit that I did not reproach you very bitterly for destroying that golden boat. Yet had you not done so, I say with all seriousness that the need to enlist the help of this man would probably never have arisen. I do not reproach you now. Please get that into your head. I may not agree with the impulse that led you to do what you did, but I think I have enough imagination—enough of you in me, of myself in you—to understand your reasons. Won’t you set your imagination to work now, and try to understand my reasons for what I am doing? You need not agree with them. I don’t ask you to. But do, Vivien, help me by not trying to spoil my game. There! I’ve said all I can say.”

Had Vivien been capable of driving a bargain, this was the moment to win her father’s consent to marriage with Dick. But she did not think about herself or her hopes in the dismay she felt for the wound to her father’s pride this appeal must have inflicted. Suddenly she perceived his immense loneliness and noticed how the lines had deepened on his handsome face during these last months. She remembered the look in his eyes when she left him in this room with the telegram that told of Murdo’s death, and she forgot his follies and his failures in a desire to console him. She jumped up from the stiff Gothic chair to go and sit on that knee where she had not sat for nigh ten years.

“I’m sorry about the sun-boat, Father. But I don’t think I can pretend I wouldn’t do the same again. Anyway, if we’ve got to have Fuller, I’ll help to get him. There, that’s a promise. A solemn promise.”

The Knight patted her hand.

“Thanks, my dear girl. I’m really extremely obliged to you. And, Vivien,” he added, with obvious embarrassment, “I should be equally obliged if you would keep this little business between you and me to yourself. I shouldn’t like Venetia to get it into her head that I was breaking up.”

She assured him that nobody should ever know anything about it and was glad to see him smile. It crossed her mind to beg him not to gamble while he was away. But even such a request savoured too much of trying to drive a bargain, and bidding him an affectionate good night she went back to the tower.

After she had left her father, Vivien began to wonder if she had not allowed sentiment to get the better of common sense. Might she not have done more good by being brutal, and telling him that he had only to thank his own vice of gambling for the difficulty in which he found himself? He would have been mortified and angry, but straight hitting might have pulled him together. Then the memory of midsummer's noon came back to her. It was she who had dared the island to evoke the Cheshire Cat. He was the product of destiny. Destiny must determine the outcome. And whether it had been foolish or whether it had been wise she had pledged her word.

"I say, what *did* Father want to tell you?" Venetia asked.

"Oh, just about behaving ourselves while he's away."

Venetia eyed her sister keenly.

"I suppose you know your lips are trembling?" she pressed.

"I suppose you know that to-morrow you'll start working again?" Vivien retorted.

28

IDEALS

Sir Caleb Fuller did not manage to find anybody who was willing to relieve him immediately of the burden of the yacht. Consequently his right of lodging at the Old Inn was not exercised so often as the girls had feared, for, though the lodging might be free, there was not much savour to be gained from it so long as he had to pay the few odd hands he had kept on to maintain the *Butterfly* in Penzawn harbour for the rest of the Summer. The first night he stayed on Roon Vivien invited him up to dinner at the House. He was alone, because his son had not yet arrived in Lyonesse, and Miss Upcott had been sent back in the launch after tea to get an evening's work out of the yacht's steward. The visitor was even more effusive than usual all through dinner, praising the food, opening his eyes at the wine, admiring the portraits of bygone Romares, and

continually assuring his young hostesses what a particular devotion he had for girls.

"I do hope when Norman arrives that we shall be able to have some nice little picnics. I expect *you* like picnics, don't you?" This to Venetia.

"No, I happen to hate them."

"*Do* you? Why, I thought all little girls liked picnics. But of course, as I told you once, I've never had any little girls of my own."

This mournfully to Vivien, who was frowning a criticism of her sister's rudeness. Sir Caleb fancied she might be worried because the conversation looked like becoming a little too advanced for a girl of fourteen, and he asked quickly if Venetia was fond of kittens.

"They're all right, but I like puppies best. Our setter bitch has just had a litter of seven."

Sir Caleb gasped. He was always so careful to refer to such creatures as lady dogs. He always talked too of lady goats and lady rabbits, and he might even have talked of lady bulls if the wife of a friend of his had not borne that name and title. Indeed one of the reasons why kittens attracted him was the nice ambiguity that shrouded their sex.

After dinner Vivien and Venetia took their guest into the drawing-room, a gaunt early Victorian apartment—the product of their grandmother's taste, and nowadays hardly ever entered.

"I so often recall the happy days we used to have on the *Butterfly* in the Mediterranean," Sir Caleb sighed lusciously.

"Yes," said Vivien.

"Yes," said Venetia.

And I *am* so hoping that we are going to be able to turn dear little Roon into one great big boatload of happiness," he beamed.

The girls looked at each other.

"Yes," said Vivien.

"Yes," said Venetia.

One might have supposed that Sir Caleb suffered from a kind of intellectual diabetes, so rapidly did his mental processes convert every experience and every intention of his into sugar.

"You know, I've taken such a fancy to your dear father that I want to help him with the business side of Roon," he announced in a bedside voice. "He oughtn't to be worrying his head about ways and means. My great wish now is to see that he is perfectly happy and free from every kind of worry. If, as I hope and believe

will come to pass, I can manage to relieve him of half the burden of Roon, my chief pleasure will be the thought I've been able to be of some little help to him."

"Yes," said Vivien.

"Yes," said Venetia.

Had a pickpocket told them that he only wanted to relieve an old woman of her purse to spare her the trouble of carrying it, their assent would not have been more dubious.

"I'm going to have a good look round into everything of course," Sir Caleb went on like a young and enthusiastic deacon trying to impress a pair of cynical Sunday-school teachers. "But it struck me this afternoon when I saw those two poor horses dragging that great big load of coal up the hill how much better it would be to have motor lorries for all the heavy carting. In fact I'm going to advise your dear father to use machinery for everything he can. I hate to see hores straining up a hill, and I hate to see them standing about with nothing to do except eat. It seems to me that horses are always either overworking or overeating."

Vivien managed to kick Venetia in time to prevent her bursting in with a protest.

"Of course I don't pretend to be a farmer," he went on, "though we have two dear little Kerry cows at Bilkton."

He would have liked to explain all the beautiful time-saving devices he had installed in his model dairy; but, as that might have involved him in various details about the milking which he did not think would be nice for young girls to hear, he decided that the mechanism of tractors would be a more suitable topic. "I feel sure that the problem of farming on Roon can only be solved by machinery. Your dear father was telling me what a business it was to get all this seaweed up from the beach. Well, do you know what I've done? You'll never guess. So, I'll tell you. The Government offered the town of Brigham a tank to put in the recreation ground as a reminder of the war, but the town council voted against accepting it. I didn't like the idea of this poor tank being broken up just because a home couldn't be found for it. So I offered to be responsible for its future myself. And it's coming here!"

The two girls stared.

"Tanks are just the thing for sea-weed. They'll go over anything. I never saw them in action of course, but this one could carry quite a lot of men, so it ought to be able to carry quite a nice lot of sea-weed, oughtn't it?"

The girls were too much overcome by Sir Caleb's announcement to protest against the sacrilege, and he beamed at their stupefaction.

"I see you're quite excited by the prospect. We're going to have lots and lots of fun on Roon. Norman will be here next week."

"Is he bringing this stray tank?" Venetia asked.

Sir Caleb shook his head roguishly to show that he had a keen sense of humour and could appreciate her little joke.

"I see you have a piano. Won't one of you play me something?" he begged.

Both girls said hurriedly that they could not play.

"What a pity! I love music," he avowed. "Good music of course. I don't like Wagner. I think he's a little bit unwholesome. What a pity I haven't got my player-piano here. You know, I consider myself quite an expert. When I'm feeling worried over business I always sit down at my player-piano which cost me a very large sum. It's really a beauty. Yes, I just sit down and play Rubinstein's *Melody in F* and I forget all my troubles. And I've got an organ; but of course I only play sacred music on my organ," he added reverently.

The evening came to an end at half-past ten, because Sir Caleb was quite sure that he ought not to keep his kind young hostesses up, and not even Vivien's good manners could stand the strain of pressing him to stay any longer.

"Oh dear, how dark it is!" he exclaimed when he was being escorted across the lawn to the drive. Summer time was not kept on Roon owing to the opposition of the Knight himself, strongly supported by Holt.

"There's no moon now," Vivien explained.

"Yes, but I don't think a place ought to depend on moonlight," Sir Caleb said with a hint of disapproval. "I shall advise your dear father to have a few lamp-posts put up round the island. I wouldn't recommend using electricity unless we find that we can get our power from the tides as I hope. But it would be quite easy to have a coal-gas plant installed by the harbour. It is dark! I suppose there's nothing unpleasant on Roon?"

"Unpleasant?" Vivien echoed.

"I mean to say, there aren't supposed to be any ghosts or anything unpleasant like that?"

"Well!" Venetia exclaimed. "You *have* surprised me! I never knew that people who believed in motor-cars believed in ghosts."

"Oh, of course I don't believe in them," Sir Caleb assured her.

"I was only wondering if the island was supposed to be haunted, because I was thinking that if it was we should *have* to have a few lamp-posts to attract hotel visitors."

He spoke as if they were moths.

"You'll get used to the dark in a minute or two," Venetia said encouragingly.

"I dare say I shall," he sighed, as he set out very cautiously to make the dangerous descent to his lodging. No doubt he consoled himself for the shocking inconvenience of the road by remembering that he had had a free dinner and would sleep in a bed for which no charge would be made.

A few days later he announced to the girls that he had discovered just the right kind of portable torch for Roon. This was a small box that was hung round the neck of the wayfarer who by pulling a couple of strings backward and forward could manufacture enough electric light to illuminate the darkness two yards before him. Equipped with this apparatus Sir Caleb twinkled in the night as securely as a firefly, to which the noise of the handworked accumulator added the whir of a belated cockchafer.

"And I bought them for ninepence each from a government dump," he announced.

Psycho-analysts assure us that a certain complex, which with their own obscenity complex they attach to the least honourable portion of the human body, is responsible among other things for excessive avarice and excessive tidiness. Certainly Sir Caleb loved tidiness next to money. He was for ever shocking the sensitiveness of Vivien and Venetia by his earnestly expressed longing to tidy up Roon. He assured them that the towans would be much more beautiful when they were turned into nice links with fairways of neat and pretty grass meandering through the horrid wastes of brambles and rushes and eglantine; and he was convinced that eighteen little red flags would give a touch of amenity to a landscape that these mats of insignificant wild roses did so much to spoil. Wire-netting was surely nicer to look at than great sprawling untidy hedges, and it would add so much to the aged dignity of that big elm-tree at the foot of the drive if it could be fenced in with iron railings. Besides, if the trippers were to be made profitable, they should be discouraged from obtaining shade and shelter from that elm-tree for nothing, when a hundred yards along they could be made to pay for both at the Inn. Then there was that unpleasant mossy stuff on the trees, which ought all to be picked off. He

asked Tom Bell if two men couldn't be told off to see how much lichen they could exterminate in a day, when he would be prepared to work out how much it would cost and how long it would take to clear the whole island of the horrible stuff. Tom Bell was as doubtful of success as the Carpenter when the Walrus asked him about tidying up the beach, and like the Carpenter Tom Bell shed a tear, because the notion of thoroughly clearing up the Roon trees struck him as a very good one and he was sorry that it was not feasible economically. A commodity, of which Sir Caleb felt there was a sad lack on Roon, was notice-boards. He was sure that the trippers were longing for notice-boards. These notice-boards, he added, should be painted in some conspicuous and original way. In fact, it would be nice to paint the whole island conspicuously and originally. Instead of seeing one cottage with a white door, and another cottage with a red door, how much nicer it would be if they were both painted green and yellow like the colours of Sir Morgan's burgee. When the golf-links were made, posts would have to be erected on suitable eminences to indicate the direction of the next hole. They could be painted green and yellow. The boats should be green and yellow; gates, palings, carts, wheelbarrows, watering-cans and pig-troughs should all be green and yellow; and those ugly tarred water-butts, they should certainly be green and yellow.

"You might tattoo Tom Bell green and yellow," Venetia suggested. "I'm sure he'd like it."

Sir Caleb frowned. He was beginning to think that Venetia was inclined to be impertinent, and he had a horror of impertinent little girls. Luckily her sister was a much nicer kind of girl. Poor Vivien, who was suffering inwardly more than Venetia, was trying to keep the word she had pledged to her father, and much to her young sister's indignation she was pretending to agree with the Cheshire Cat all the while.

There was some delay about the arrival of the tank. So Sir Caleb who was thirsting to give Roon the joys of civilization ordered on his own responsibility a small tractor with which he proposed to convert Holt from his foolish old belief in horses. The tractor arrived, and Sir Caleb in much excitement went down to purr round it on the pier for a couple of amorous hours. In the afternoon his engineer arrived from the yacht to drive it up the hill like a juggernaut that would for ever obliterate old-fashioned methods of agriculture on Roon.

Half-way up the drive the tractor blew up with a louder bang than one of Sir Caleb's five-guinea maroons, which gave Holt the pleasure of harnessing his team and dragging the poor piece of mortal handiwork back down the hill to the pier, where it remained to await various parts that had to be sent all the way from America to put it together again.

After his failure with the tractor, Sir Caleb went into the question of harnessing the tides to do his bidding. He bobbed round the island with an electrical expert in a small boat, but found that the idea was impracticable. Then he decided to go into the question of the water supply, having heard that the big well was running very low. A dowser was brought over who found water with his hazel-fork wherever he observed a slightly richer green in the grass or the watercrow's-foot flourishing. Then would the dowser's eyes bulge and the veins of his forehead stand out like cords as the hazel insisted on pointing downward, whatever force he used to resist its infallible impulse. Sir Caleb like so many hard-headed men of business was full of credulity when it would cost him nothing if he believed. He had explained to Tom Bell that Sir Morgan would pay the dowser for his time, because on the presence of water the partnership really hinged. Finally it was decided to deepen the well.

"I'm sure I'm not going beyond what Sir Morgan would wish, Lieutenant Bell," said Sir Caleb, "if I take it upon myself to authorize you to get four well-sinkers over as soon as possible. As soon as possible, because if I may say so, Lieutenant Bell, procrastination is one of the worst difficulties you have to contend with on Roon."

"That's what I'm always telling Sir Morgan," said Tom Bell earnestly; and the well-sinkers were imported within a week.

Meanwhile, in addition to taking it upon himself to authorize Tom Bell to deepen wells and pay dowsers to perform unsatisfactory conjuring tricks, Sir Caleb and Miss Upcott were hard at work mastering the economy of Roon. At the end of an exhaustive survey of Tom Bell's books together with any general information that he could extract from him about the Knight's resources Sir Caleb knew exactly where he was. His grey eyes kindled with the peculiar luminousness of greed, as only certain grey eyes can, lighted up with gulosity as blue or brown eyes light up with love and passion and pity and rage. He licked his lips as if he could already taste upon them the honey of a bargain.

"Thank you, Lieutenant Bell," he murmured in his dreamiest voice. "And I would like to compliment you if I may on your books. They do you a good deal of credit."

Tom Bell glowed. He respected Sir Morgan; he loved Roon; but neither Sir Morgan nor the island had ever appreciated his books. Here was a man of business who did. Tom Bell regarded him with grateful awe.

"I do hope you will come to Roon, Sir Caleb."

"I hope so too, Lieutenant Bell. But of course so much will depend on what I find myself in a position to do in September. Doesn't it, Miss Upcott?"

Miss Upcott shook her head.

"Indeed it does, Sir Caleb."

"Miss Upcott knows how difficult it is for me to do always exactly what I would like to do. Why," he went on, waxing enthusiastic, "I'd like to say to Sir Morgan, 'Here's ten thousand pounds. Spend it just as you think will be best for Roon.'"

In Tom Bell's eyes adoration was blazing.

"But I couldn't do that, could I, Miss Upcott?"

She smiled compassionately.

"However, we'll do what we can, won't we, Miss Upcott?"

She smiled hopefully.

Sir Caleb Fuller lay awake nearly all that night, contemplating what was his best way to go to work over Roon. He never admitted even to himself any but the highest motives for what he did, and psychologizing with people like that is as difficult as doing business with them, because dishonesty is so pervasively inherent in them as almost to resemble a chemical process. It really was a diabetes of the mind from which he suffered. Nobody but a Sir Caleb could have told the Knight without a blush for his own shamelessness that story about the American Lammam and the commission of which he had been cheated. But Sir Caleb sincerely believed that the story was an illustration of the falsity of human friendship and the fineness of his own patriotism. And at this moment he believed with equal sincerity that the chief motive actuating him was an affection for the Knight of Roon. He did like the Knight, as men often like those who present themselves in the guise of easy and willing victims. Sir Caleb had social ambitions, but on his principle of nothing for nothing people with a long ancestry like Romare of Roon must expect to pay for their advantages. A partnership with the Knight would benefit himself, but it would

benefit the Knight more, and therefore it was only fair that he should pay that much more for it. There was no reason why ultimately the development of the island should not show a handsome return on capital invested; but it could not show any return for several years. Therefore it would be unreasonable to expect him to become a partner at once. On the other hand, from what he could gather of Romare's resources, unless money were forthcoming quickly Romare would lose his island. Undoubtedly the furniture alone was worth a great deal of money, so much indeed that it would be ridiculous to allow it to be put into the valuation. Suppose he could persuade Romare to allow his house to be turned into an hotel, that furniture would be an extravagance if paid for at what it was worth, but it would lend a cachet to the kind of hotel he had in mind. So too would the Knight himself. The problem, therefore, was to keep both on the island, and meanwhile to develop it with a view to opening that hotel in about three years' time. To this end he must not only obtain a long option on Roon itself, but he must somehow involve the Knight so deeply that he would not lose the advantage of himself, his atmosphere, and his possessions when the moment was ripe to take up the option. It was really doing Romare a kindness to keep him from squandering any more of his belongings. It might be as well to get somebody down here next week who could tell him what the furniture really was worth. But that old armour and those pictures alone must be worth a great deal. Suppose he should lend Romare £10,000, some of which could be spent immediately on various improvements? He would have 6 per cent. on his money, and what was more by lending the money on the security of the furniture he could prevent its being sold until the loan was repaid. He could insist on Romare's staying on the island too, for it was extremely unlikely that an unbusinesslike man such as he would not very soon be in default with his repayments. That would enable him to dictate entirely about the development of Roon without taking up the option at once. If in three or four years he found that Roon did not look like being a commercial proposition, he would choose as much of the furniture as was required to pay himself back, and no harm would have been done. How lucky for Romare to have met a man like himself! Some people really did have luck!

"Nobody ever came and offered to lend me £10,000," said Sir Caleb to himself sadly.

29

CARRACKOON IN DANGER

Norman Fuller arrived in Roon about the middle of August, and the girls found him so much less intolerable than they had feared after their experience of his parent that they were inclined, particularly Vivien who was clutching at straws to justify her father's proposed deal with Sir Caleb, to accord him a friendship considerably in excess of what, had they met in other circumstances, they would have been prepared to accord him. Young Fuller on his side was so agreeably astonished to find a couple of genuinely attractive girls included in the prospective bargain that he outdid his father in his enthusiasm over Roon. He assured Vivien and Venetia in confidence that all this mania for improvement would work itself off and that if his father did come to terms with their father he could pledge his word that the old island life would not be nearly so much disturbed as they feared.

"Don't you worry your heads," he said. "He's a funny old boy. Always gets worked up like this over any new project. But he's got plenty of common sense at bottom. I don't mind telling you that I was all against the notion of this place when he first told me about it. But I'm a convert. We'll have no end of fun here."

From young Fuller the girls learnt that the firework business had been in existence much longer than they had imagined. Indeed it had been founded over a century ago by his great-grandmother, an Italian woman. The idea that Sir Caleb Fuller could have Italian blood like themselves seemed incredible, but his son gave chapter and verse for his statement. It transpired too that Lady Darlington, who had visited Roon with her husband in a yacht a year or two before the war and to both of whom Vivien as a little girl had taken a great fancy, was actually his first cousin.

"As a matter of fact I've never seen her," he admitted, "because her mother quarrelled with my father years ago. She was an actress and my uncle was an actor, and my cousin Lady Darlington was at the Vanity Theatre, before she married Darlington. I fancy that my uncle was cut off by my grandfather Joshua Fuller for going on the stage. But don't tell my father you know anything

about this connexion. Of course he has no prejudice against the stage, but he has a great idea of family duty and he never mentions it even to me. I was told by my mother."

"So, he isn't just a profiteer?" said Venetia bluntly.

Young Fuller laughed.

"Oh, I expect he did make a bit over during the war. But we're a pretty old firm, and he resents it tremendously if you suggest that he did. I was at Cambridge when war broke out."

The girls decided to accept all this information as an expression of frankness and simplicity rather than to ascribe it to the same motive as led his father to tell them how much he paid for everything.

"Of course," Vivien said to her sister, "I think Norman dresses a little bit too well, and I think he's a little too fond of talking about the last country house he stayed in as if it was a good new hotel he had discovered. Still, he might be much worse."

"And he's not bad-looking," Venetia added.

"No, he really isn't," she agreed. "Of course he can't manage his neck properly."

"And he will smoke cigarettes too importantly," Venetia suggested.

"Yes, *why* do young men like Norman always smoke cigarettes so importantly?"

"Well, you know the way bulls puff at you, Vivien. And Norman is a bit like a young bull. I wonder what Dick would think of him."

"Hate him," Vivien declared.

Her sister nodded.

"Especially if he sees the way he looks at you."

Vivien frowned.

"It's no use frowning, darling. Because you know as well as I do that Norman hopes to make a conquest."

"What a silly joke," said Vivien angrily.

"It can't be quite so silly, or you wouldn't be blushing," Venetia argued. Then seeing that Vivien might become angrier than she was intending to make her she resumed her criticisms of young Fuller. "It's funny that he should have done nothing but collect tin-cans during the war. Still, he might have been worse."

And this was the conclusion that the two girls always reached at the end of any discussion about Norman Fuller.

Having by this time decided what line he was going to take with the owner of Roon on his return, Sir Caleb was anxious that he should come home from Aix as soon as possible, and he begged Vivien to do all she could to secure this. Sir Caleb knew from Tom Bell that the Knight was liable to gamble away most of his current account, and if he could have been sure of this happening he would have preferred him to remain abroad until an actual shortage of ready money fetched him home. But it occurred to Sir Caleb that his proposed partner was just as liable to win money, which was not at all what he wanted.

"I would almost feel inclined to send him a telegram," he urged.

Vivien demurred to this, though she promised to write and impress on her father that Sir Caleb was waiting impatiently for his return. Tom Bell was equally anxious that she should beg the Knight to come home. He even ventured to hint something about the danger of losing too much money at Aix which, as Vivien would never admit that he was in her father's confidence to the extent he was, made her furious.

"Why don't you write to Sir Morgan yourself, Bell?"

"I have, Miss Vivien. But I'd like you to help."

"Why doesn't Sir Caleb Fuller write?"

"I think he's anxious not to worry Sir Morgan while he's on his holiday. He did write to him about the deepening of the well, and the tractor. And Sir Morgan wrote back, 'Glad you're enjoying yourself on Roon.' But I know Sir Morgan doesn't want to lose Sir Caleb, Miss Vivien, and I wish you'd put in a word. He's been through all my books twice now, and there isn't much for him to do, and he's getting so impatient. I'm afraid he may get tired of Roon if Sir Morgan don't come back soon."

Sir Caleb Fuller was uttering Alexandrine sighs for new worlds to conquer. He had mastered Tom Bell's books. He was tired of standing on the pier to count how many shillings were pouring into Sir Morgan's coffers from the traffic in trippers, which was now in the month of August so heavy as to make the north side of the island intolerable till the last boat-load of them sailed back to Penzawn about seven o'clock. Wandering round Rosevean one afternoon, he cast a luminous and greedy eye on Carrackoon. It was time, he decided, that some steps were taken about that other island. So, to the alarm of the two girls, he arrived one morning in the launch full of plans for a picnic there.

"Of course I haven't explored it yet," he said. "But I quite agree with your dear father that we want both islands for our little scheme. I understand from him that the Palatinate officials had some hidebound objection to any Romare leasing Carrackoon. But of course that would not apply to me. So I took it on myself to make some inquiries at the Controller's office yesterday, and I understand that it may be offered at any moment. I gave Mr. Penfold to understand that I was prepared to pay a trifle more than any rent the Palatinate decided to ask, which as I pointed out would spare them the expense of public advertisement, and he thanked me very warmly."

"Oh, he always thanks everybody for everything," said Venetia quickly. "That doesn't mean anything. Still, if you'd like a picnic there, of course we should *love* a picnic there. So *do* let's go."

Vivien was staring at her sister aghast, incapable of comprehending from the grimaces she was making what was hidden under her apparent treachery. She had been dreading all this Summer to hear Sir Caleb's dreamy voice float across the strait and coil itself round Carrackoon. And now instead of discouraging him, here was Venetia egging him on to a picnic there. She pulled herself together.

"I don't think the tides will be right this week," she said coldly.

Sir Caleb frowned. The tides were already in his bad graces over their failure to adapt themselves to his electrical schemes. And now here they were again, daring to put difficulties in the way of his doing something at the very moment he wanted to do it.

"Of course the tides will suit," Venetia contradicted eagerly.

Vivien reproached her when they were alone; but Venetia only laughed in the excitement of her plan.

"You are a blind mole, Vivien. Don't you understand that it's a plot to give the Cheshire Cat a sickener of Carrackoon for the rest of his life? All you've got to do is to keep young Norman occupied, which will be quite easy, and I'll look after the C.C."

"What are you going to do?"

"Never mind. But the first thing is to land him an hour before low water and make him climb up the rocks. So hurry up, because we ought to be off before half-past twelve if my plot's going to work. You leave it to me, my girl. I managed things very well for you on Carrackoon before, didn't I?"

Vivien was too much worried over Sir Caleb's sudden interest in Carrackoon to hope anything from Venetia's plot; but she consoled herself for agreeing to picnic with him there by telling herself that any opposition would only make him more eager to possess the little island. The *Mermaid* took them across, and she noticed that Venetia was busily engaged in a mysterious conversation with Hamblyn; but she supposed that this had reference to the point at which they were landed, which was the most awkward that could have been chosen.

"It's jolly difficult landing here at low water," Venetia said cheerfully, when Sir Caleb had made his third unsuccessful effort to jump from the stern of the *Mermaid* on to the slimy rocks covered with sea-weed. "And it's worse at high water," she added. "Isn't it, Hamblyn?"

"Very nasty indeed at high water, miss," the old boatman agreed. "Well, not hardly safe you might say six days out of the seven."

Norman Fuller jumped at this moment and landed, only to slide down the face of the rock up to his knees in the water. If he had not been so eager to impress Vivien with his fitness for an island life, he might have been angry. As it was, he made light of his wetting, and urged her to take advantage of his proffered hand.

"Go on, Vivien," said Venetia in a fierce whisper. "You are a silly sloach. Go on, I tell you. Take his hand, you ass! And don't hang about. Push on with Norman."

Vivien jumped and allowed Norman Fuller the gratification of supposing that he had saved her from falling into the sea. As soon as Vivien was ashore, the son showed a regrettable indifference to his father's future, although when he feared that he might abandon the picnic owing to the difficulty of the landing he had been encouraging him with extended arms to jump.

"Now, Sir Caleb," Venetia announced, when Vivien and Norman were scrambling on ahead, "I'm going to look after you."

Sir Caleb managed a smile that was like the faint glow of a worn-out electric burner. However, he was bundled ashore at last by Hamblyn and Venetia, the latter of whom now evinced for his progress a solicitude that might have made him suspicious, had his mind been less earnestly occupied with the slimy rugosity over which he was being led.

"If you put your foot here, Sir Caleb," she would suggest, then quickly added, as his calf disappeared in a damp congestion of

fucus, "Oh, I'm so awfully sorry, I thought that was firm ground. But this ledge is all right, if you hold on to that family of limpets and don't try to go too fast."

Once, when she had led him round a sheer face of rock overhanging a deep crystalline pool, and he was clinging to it as tightly as if he was a limpet himself, Venetia begged him to turn round and look at the beauty of the pool below and the way the little rainbow-hued rockfish were darting in and out of the rosy fronds of the weed that fringed it. Sir Caleb's instinctive politeness made him attempt to turn his crimson face to oblige her, with the result that his yachting-cap was knocked off his snowy curls into the water.

Venetia at once offered to rescue it for him. She was afraid that she had imperilled the success of the real plot by trying him too hardly at the beginning of the picnic, because she was almost sure that he had muttered an oath, the vigour of which so far exceeded anything she could have supposed him capable of uttering in public that she feared he was getting into a real temper.

"That's the last difficult bit," she assured him. "And I'll carry your hat. It'll soon dry in the sun."

"I can't understand how anybody has ever managed to live on this place," said Sir Caleb crossly, when sweating with exertion he rested his plump body at the head of the shelving beach and looked back resentfully at the slimy ochreous promontory over which he had been lured.

"Well, of course it is very difficult," Venetia agreed.

"However, we could build a pier," said Sir Caleb, and in his accent there was such a threat to the isolation of Carrackoon that Venetia shivered for its safety.

Sir Caleb cheered up Vivien by declaring that the house where one day she and Dick meant to live was not fit to house a pig. It was cheering, too, to hear him disparage the tangled garden and the ugly ruin. Nor was dread of his greed increased by the way he jumped when a large spider dropped from the ceiling into his glass of moselle.

After lunch Venetia suggested lightly that Vivien should take Norman to see the little wood.

"You don't mind my calling you Norman?" she said with what she feared was almost too exaggerated an archness.

And the effusiveness with which father and son welcomed such a mark of intimacy served to hide the obvious wrath with which

Vivien received the suggestion about the little wood. Nor did all Venetia's winks induce her to look less indignant.

"I'm going to show Sir Caleb the Tol," she proclaimed.

Sir Caleb beamed and asked what that was.

"It's a jolly interesting place," Venetia went on excitedly. "And if you take Carrackoon, I think you ought to charge trippers for going into it."

She knew how to bait the hook. Sir Caleb had not yet seen anything of Carrackoon for which he could hope to extract a halfpenny from the British public, and the prospect of finding a profitable attraction made him accept her invitation with alacrity.

"You can come and pick us up there in about an hour, Vivien."

Her sister hesitated.

"Go on, Vivien. Take Norman to the top of the island then, and show him the view from there."

It struck Sir Caleb that this little girl whom he had once or twice been inclined to consider rather impertinent was really a very sensible little girl after all, and a far-seeing little girl—almost the kind of little girl he should have been glad to call his own.

"Come along, Venetia," he said playfully. "You and I will go and explore the—what did you call it—the Toll? What a pretty name!"

Venetia nodded; but even with her quickness for words she did not realize that Sir Caleb was mentally spelling it with two l's and relishing the augury.

"What is the origin of the name Toll?" Sir Caleb inquired.

"Oh, it just means 'hole.'"

"But Toll is much prettier," he declared emphatically.

Venetia timed things well. They reached the archway leading in just as the tide was beginning to come round the corner. But it had meant another hot scramble over rocks, and Sir Caleb was not inclined to fancy that many trippers would pay for the privilege of the exploration.

"But don't you think it's glorious inside?" Venetia exclaimed.

"Yes, it's very pretty," said Sir Caleb, without much conviction, looking at the great python-stem of ivy by whose aid Dick had rescued Carrots that October day nearly two years ago. "And oh dear, what is that?"

It was a pale mauve jelly-fish stranded on the granite slabs at the bottom of the Tol and waiting there to be rescued by the incoming tide.

"They bite, don't they?" he inquired, eyeing the exquisite mess suspiciously as if it were likely to spring at him.

Venetia reassured him and begged him to sit down and rest for awhile after the fatigue of the scramble round. Sir Caleb did not at all enjoy this dank gloomy place, and he would have much preferred to go back and recover from his fatigue somewhere on the cliffs instead of putting up with this dreadful marine smell that seemed to him like a cross between stale pickles and drains. But he did not like to refuse Venetia, and so very gingerly he sat down as far as he could get from that horrible jelly-fish.

Venetia prayed to herself that Vivien would not spoil the success of her plot by coming along with Norman and shouting over the top that if they were not quick they would be caught by the tide. Her heart was beating so fast with excitement that she scarcely knew how to entertain Sir Caleb with her chatter. Indeed she was so fidgety that her companion suggested once or twice that it might be as well to go back now. Then she had a happy inspiration. She would ask him to explain to her something about the insides of tractors. She sighed with relief as he beamed and, regardless now of the stranded jelly-fish or the unpleasant smell, set out to tell her all about the beauty and utility and cheapness of machinery. He was in the middle of an account of the way he had once saved four shillings and twopence a week by making one hot-water pipe do something that other people would have been perfectly content to see performed by half a dozen, when Venetia sprang to her feet and pointed to the archway.

"Sir Caleb! We're cut off!" she cried dramatically.

"Cut off?" he echoed. "I don't understand you, I'm afraid." He was not exactly looking round for the telephone, because that *would* have been too absurd, but he was trying to disentangle the word from the association it always had for him.

"Cut off by the tide," Venetia repeated, pointing to the archway through which the water was now rippling fast.

"The tide?" Sir Caleb exclaimed angrily. It appeared as if he did not intend to stand much more nonsense from tides.

"We'll have to climb out," she declared. "It's quite easy. Give me a bung up to this ivy, and I'll show you the way."

Sir Caleb helped her to reach the stem without making the least objection. He rather enjoyed the sensation of this little girl on his shoulders. He fancied that the emotion it roused in him was paternal. And he would have smiled up at her paternally if his

face had not been almost flattened against the bare rock below the ivy.

"Come on," said Venetia, climbing rapidly up the same way Dick had climbed that famous day with Carrots.

"I can't find anywhere to climb," Sir Caleb called after her as he tried to grasp the trunk of the ivy that she with the help of his shoulders had grasped so easily.

When Venetia had reached the top of the Tol she lay down on her face and peered over.

"If you could only jump another foot, you'd be able to reach it."

Sir Caleb, walking backward to direct his voice up to where Venetia's red-brown hair was visible on the sky line, stepped on the jelly-fish, and the leap with which he sprang off it was certainly a good foot higher than anything he had achieved yet.

"Try again," Venetia advised, "and pretend you're standing on a jelly-fish. But if you can't do it, I'll go and get a rope."

"The sooner you get a rope the better," he shouted. "The water's coming in faster every minute."

"Right-o," Venetia called down. "But you needn't get nervous. The water won't be over your head for another three hours at least."

She met Vivien with Norman Fuller round the curve of the cliffs and explained her mission.

"You go and talk to him over the edge," she told them, "and keep his spirits up while I go and wave for Hamblyn."

She did not want to listen to Vivien's remonstrances with her thoughtlessness, but skipped away as cheerful as she felt. And she felt very cheerful indeed, because she had arranged with Hamblyn not to arrive until four o'clock, by which time the water would have reached Sir Caleb's waist.

"Perhaps he'll understand a little more about tides after this," she laughed to herself.

As a matter of fact, by the time she got back to the Tol with Hamblyn and a coil of rope the water had reached Sir Caleb's chest. When he was hauled out, he was speechless with rage, damp and cold. He stalked ahead of the party that followed him in single file round the cliffs toward the beach. Neither Vivien nor young Fuller said a word, being too much exhausted by the strain of keeping up loud small talk with the angry prisoner for nearly two hours. Vivien, too, was worried about the effect of it all on the magnate. She had pledged her word to her father not to do anything to

discourage him from his project of entering into the partnership, and when young Fuller whispered to her in a sad voice that this would probably mean the old man's abandonment of the islands for evermore, although her heart involuntarily leapt with gladness she was thoroughly worried.

When they reached Roon Sir Caleb announced his intention of going back at once to the yacht.

"But won't you come up to the House and have a bath or something?" Venetia suggested.

"Bath?" he repeated furiously. "Don't you think I've had enough bath this afternoon?"

Venetia began to giggle, because she could not help seeing the funny side of her hospitable suggestion. The *Butterfly's* launch came alongside the pier, and Sir Caleb flapped down the steps in his soaked rubber shoes without saying good-bye to either of the girls. His son tried to atone for his father's discourtesy by shaking hands with both of them so earnestly that Sir Caleb looked up angrily from the stern of the launch and asked if he proposed to keep him waiting much longer.

"Well," Venetia declared triumphantly when they were gone, "I do think that's the most successful plot I've ever had. Of course, if I'd drowned him it would have been better, but I didn't *quite* like to do that. I don't think *he'll* do much more about taking Carrackoon."

"Or Roon either," said Vivien.

"Oh, Vivien, how wonderful. Well, in that case the island ought to give me back my locket as a medal."

Vivien felt that she ought to tell Venetia about that talk in the library the night before their father went away. But the memory of the way his pride had suffered restrained her. She could not discuss even with Venetia his dreadful dependence on the Cheshire Cat's smile. Nor could she bring herself to acknowledge that the future of herself and Venetia on Roon might be in his hands. After all, something might occur to save the situation. For the first time in her life she understood her father's emotion about gambling and sympathized with it.

However, Vivien need not have been anxious. The following afternoon Sir Caleb arrived with a smile that was richer than any they had yet been favoured with. It glistened on his podgy cheeks like lard.

"I'm afraid I must have sounded a little put out yesterday," he said with an expression of wistful penitence. "I'm quite ashamed

of myself. Norman was quite cross with me. He said I was so bad-tempered. I do hope you'll forgive me, Vivien—you don't mind my calling you Vivien, do you?—and I never thanked you, Venetia, for so kindly fetching that rope. I think I must have been a little bit upset by treading on that jelly-fish. I've got a real horror of creepy-crawly things. And I've such a splendid idea for Carrackoon. You'll never guess what it is!"

The girls looked at him apprehensively. They hoped he was not going to take advantage of his knowledge of explosives to blow the island up for its bad behaviour.

"I called in to see Mr. Penfold again this morning," he said. "And I asked him to let me know as soon as possible what rent the Palatinate was going to ask. I made it quite clear that I would give a little more if he would offer it to me immediately. I know your dear father will be pleased. Mr. Penfold promised to go into the question; but I'm afraid he's one of those people who move rather slowly. He ought to have jumped at my offer. Yes, I've quite decided what we'll do with Carrackoon, and I'll give you both three guesses," he added playfully. He waited for them to accept the challenge, but they sat mute.

"Give it up? I knew you would. It's a splendid idea. Well, I'll tell you. I'm going to devote Carrackoon entirely to growing poisonous plants. Isn't that a splendid idea?"

"Poisonous plants," Vivien repeated. "But why?"

"Why, I think there's quite a lot of money in the idea. I was talking to one of the Penzawn chemists, and you know, the price he has to pay wholesale for poisonous drugs is really scandalous. I don't think Carrackoon will ever be much of an attraction to visitors with that dreadful landing, and it struck me as an ideal place for a little experiment. And the difficult landing would be quite an advantage then, because people wouldn't be going there and eating the poisonous plants. Though of course I will have notices put up all round the island 'Beware of Poison.' And we could paint them bright red with a skull and crossbones above the inscription. They'd look very picturesque, which would please you two girls, and it would be nice to think that we were taking every reasonable precaution against anybody getting hurt. I'm sure your dear father will like the idea very much. By the way, did you telegraph to him as I suggested? I know how anxious he is to get everything settled, and I'm longing to relieve his mind of all worry."

"I've written to him," said Vivien. She had also written to Dick,

warning him of Sir Caleb's designs on Carrackoon. But the very next morning a letter arrived from him to say that he would have left Guernsey by the time she heard the news. He had made friends with some man who had suggested a tour round the chief horticultural establishments on the continent. He gave her an address in Haarlem to which she was to write, but he begged her not to worry if she did not get answers from him quite so regularly for the next week or two, as he and this friend intended to crowd all the experience they could into their trip. *Then I shall come back to Penzawn, he wrote, by which time Penfold ought to be able to let me know something definite about Carrackoon. I'm afraid it'll be too late to get any bulbs planted this year. But there will be plenty to do, preparing the ground. Anyway, this winter, my dearest, we shall be more or less together again. My trustees seem to be getting reconciled to the idea of my new profession. Oh, Vivien, what ages we have been apart, but I am beginning to count the weeks now instead of the months. I'm always expecting that Romare's ring will suddenly summon a genie who will carry me to Carrackoon in a moment of time.*

For Dick to be out of communication at this moment was more like the vengeance of a malicious genie loosed from a bottle than any benign slave of ring or lamp. If Sir Caleb was well informed, the lease of Carrackoon might be offered at any moment, and he was so keen to secure it that he was already plotting hard to obtain it over the heads of any rivals.

"We must go over and see Penny," Vivien told Venetia. "We must beg him to let Dick know in good time as he promised. Oh, why, why, does Dick choose this moment to go dashing about Europe to look at nursery-gardens?"

"It'll be all right, my dear. We'll talk to Penny, and I'm sure it'll be all right," Venetia insisted. "Your letter may just have caught Dick before he left. There'll probably be a wire from him if we go over to Penzawn."

They hurried down to the harbour to tell Hamblyn to put out with them at once. Sir Caleb was wandering round as usual looking for places that ought to be tidied up and improved with notice-boards. He asked them with a pinguid smile where they were going so fast, and when he heard that it was to Penzawn he volunteered to take them over in his launch.

They declined this offer with something like horror. No Greek with a gift was ever feared so much as Sir Caleb Fuller.

The Controller's Office was closed when they reached Penzawn; but they ran Penfold to earth in his neat little bachelor house on the outskirts of the town, where they found him practising putting on his neat little lawn. Peace had restored the pinkness to his cheeks, and he was now as cherubic as ever. Colonel Manton and the Lyonesse Defences had faded like some horrible dream after shell-fish.

"My dear girls, this is a most unexpected honour!" he exclaimed, leaning his putter carefully against a neat white garden-seat and coming forward to escort them into his neat little study, where he proposed to feed them with the chocolates for which he was famous.

"No, no, no, Penny dear. We don't want chocolates," Venetia protested. "We've come to see you on business."

"Yes, really we have, Penny," Vivien insisted. "It's something very important."

"But I've got some perfectly delicious new chocolates, my dear girls, and surely your business can wait till you've sampled them?"

"No, no, Penny, it can't. We must begin at once," Vivien insisted. "You've been talking to Sir Caleb Fuller."

"You've been bartering with him, Penny," Venetia added.

"And he simply must not be allowed to have Carrackoon," Vivien said.

"It'll be too utterly damnable," Venetia said.

"He wants to grow poisonous plants there," Vivien said.

"And he hates it really," Venetia added. "I tried to drown him. Don't let him come into your office any more, Penny. You know we love you very much, but we shan't love you any more if you go bartering like this with the Cheshire Cat."

The Controller put his plump little white hands up to his pink little face.

"Girls, girls! My dear Vivien! My dear Venetia! Not so fast. What are you talking about?"

"Now it's no good your trying to be official with us, Penny dear," Vivien threatened.

"Not a bit," Venetia went on. "You can be official with barts. And I hope you will be next time the Cheshire Cat comes and hangs his smile up in your beastly stuffy little office. Just tell him to bart out of it for good and all, because he's a N.A.N.P."

"A what?"

"A Not-a-nice-person."

"Are you talking about Sir Caleb Fuller?"

The girls shouted an affirmative.

"But he's a great friend of yours, isn't he?"

This time it was an equally emphatic negative they proclaimed.

"You are a mug, Penny dear! How could he be?" Vivien exclaimed.

And then she fell silent abruptly. For the first time she realized that everybody outside Roon must suppose that Sir Caleb Fuller was a great friend. She could not without disloyalty to her father say too much against him. Oh, how humiliating it all was!

"Then what's he doing on Roon?" Penfold was asking.

"Father's giving him lessons in barting," Venetia explained.

"Yes," Vivien went on, "we met him at Monte Carlo, and he lent us his yacht to come back from the Mediterranean. So father asked him down to Roon for the Summer."

"What a bore for you," said Penfold plumply.

"Vivien, I told you dear Penny would be very sympathetic, didn't I?" said Venetia. "But, Penny, it's no use talking sympathetically. You've got to do something sympathetic for us."

"At your service, my dear Venetia, as I have always been since I saw you first—looking like a shrivelled tangerine in your cradle."

"Vivien, shall I tell him, or will you?"

"You tell him."

Venetia reminded the Controller of his promise to Dick Deverell over Carrackoon and besought him not to be tempted by the Cheshire Cat's guile.

"The notices are ready now," he said. "An advertisement will be put in *The Times* next Monday. However, I'm not so base as you think me, for I did write and warn your young friend."

"But he's travelling on the Continent," said Vivien. "And he may not get your letter in time."

"My dear Vivien, you can hardly blame me for that, can you?"

"Couldn't you postpone the public notice for another week? You've waited such a long time. It wouldn't matter if you waited a little longer."

Penfold shook his head.

"Impossible, my dear girl."

"But what can we do, Penny, if he doesn't hear in time?" Vivien asked. She was finding it hard not to burst into tears, so desperate seemed the state of affairs.

"Well, if he doesn't put in his offer at once, I'm afraid he won't have much chance of being accepted as a tenant," Penfold announced in his most official voice.

"But, Penny, you know he wants it," Vivien pleaded. "Can't you pretend you've received his application?"

"No, no, no, no," the Controller protested, "I can't do things like that, my dear girl, in my position. You know that as well as I do. But cheer up! No doubt your young friend will get my letter in time."

"But suppose he doesn't?" Vivien said in despair.

Penfold shrugged his shoulders.

"Then somebody else will have the island, I'm afraid. Not necessarily Sir Caleb Fuller, however, if that's any consolation to you. Come along now and try my chocolates."

"Oh, Penny, how can you be such a heartless beast?" Venetia demanded. "How can you stand there shrugging your shoulders and talking about chocolates when Vivien's breaking her heart?"

The thought that Dick would lose Carrackoon, the thought that they might presently as good as lose Roon, the thought that any chance of being married to Dick was farther away than ever, the thought that Murdo was dead . . . all these thoughts came crowding into Vivien's brain. She turned away from Penfold, and collapsing upon the neat white garden-seat she bent low her head and sobbed. Venetia rushed to console her, and between endearments for her sister she fired insults over her shoulder at Penfold who was wringing his hands over such a scene as his neat little garden had never experienced in all its neat little life.

"We always thought you were a friend of ours," Venetia was spitting. "And when other people said you were stuffy and pompous we always got angry and told them that *we* never thought you stuffy or pompous. And now when we ask you to do something perfectly easy to show us that you're a friend you stand there and wriggle and talk about your position. Damn your position, Penny, and damn the Palatinate! You know Dick Deverell is dying to have Carrackoon. You know he and Vivien are madly in love with one another."

"I didn't, Venetia. I didn't really. Please don't be unjust," poor Penfold implored.

"Well, anybody except a boiled Palatinate owl would have known. Anyway, you know now, so you can't make *that* excuse again."

"But, Venetia," he protested, "you don't understand my position. . . ."

"I just said 'damn your position,' " she snapped.

"It would be an unheard of thing for a Crown official to pretend that he had received an application he hadn't received. I quite understand that your friend wants Carrackoon, but suppose something happened? Look what a position. . . . I mean where should I be? I should be ruined. My career would be finished. Anything in reason I'm willing to do. I might go so far as to promise you that if I receive your friend's application even twenty-four hours after the others. . . ." The Controller stopped and looked anxiously round his neat little garden. He felt like a conspirator against the Throne itself. What was he promising? He almost reeled, as he plunged on. . . . "Yes, I'll even promise you to do all I can—and I dare say I can do a great deal—all I can to get your friend accepted as the tenant of Carrackoon, provided always of course that the Admiralty, the War Office, the Home Office, the Air Ministry, and the Chancellor of the Palatinate approve of him as a tenant. We had such a lot of trouble over the German that we've got to submit his name for approval. But I will do all I can. Only he must—he really must send in a proper application."

"Well, look here," Venetia suggested. "I'll send in an application in Dick's name if you'll go over the spelling for me, Penny."

The Controller held up his hands in horror.

"Oh no, no, Venetia. I beg you not to make these appalling proposals."

"So you won't help us?" Venetia demanded.

"In reason, my dear child, in reason."

"Pooh! Anybody can help anybody in reason," she scoffed. "It's no use, Vivien, he won't help us."

Vivien had pulled herself together by now, and coming forward she took Penfold's two hands which were dangling in front of him like a kangaroo's forelegs.

"It's all right, Penny," she said. "Don't get into a state. I know you'll do everything you can."

"That's right," Venetia jeered bitterly. "Now stoop and kiss him. Vivien, really, I've no patience with you."

"Shut up, Venetia. You've hurt Penny's feelings."

Indeed there was something very like a tear in one of those distressed pale blue eyes.

"It's all right, Penny," she went on. "We must just hope for the best. And we know that you'll do all you can."

"Of course I will. Of course I will," he said earnestly. "And how very kind of you to be so kind to me. But you always were a

very kind little girl. Oh dear, oh dear, I hope now that peace has been signed we shall all settle down and be happy again. Those ghastly years!"

"Venetia!" her sister called.

"No, I'm not going to be as soft as you," said Venetia obstinately. "It's no good my pretending I feel friends with Penny when I don't. And if Dick loses Carrackoon through his stuffiness I'll never be friends with him as long as I live, what's more."

At this moment a neat little parlourmaid, with very quick short steps, walked across the neat little lawn and informed the Controller that a gentleman was very anxious to see him on business if he could possibly spare him a moment.

The Controller frowned.

"I told him you were engaged, sir," said the parlourmaid severely. "But he insisted that you wouldn't mind sparing him a moment. He gave me this card, sir."

The Controller, frowning very heavily at the notion of anybody's daring to approach him on business in his own neat little fortification of home, looked at the card. He jumped, looked again, looked up at Vivien, looked back at the card.

"Very well, Mary, I'll come in at once," he said as importantly as if it was a King's Messenger who awaited him. Then he turned to the girls.

"I won't be a moment, my dear children. Don't run off till I come back."

He marched away after the parlourmaid like a little toy figure that has been wound up to the very end.

"Venetia, you must be kind to him when he comes back," Vivien said. "You really hurt him. And he couldn't do more than he has. We must understand his point of view."

"I don't know what you're going to do with your life," said Venetia gloomily. "You give way at once. You'll really have to do something about being so weak. You really will. I'm serious. You may let yourself in for something terrible one day, simply because you can't bear to see anybody unhappy for a moment. I think you've been shockingly weak over the C.C. I know perfectly well how father got round you that last night, but I suppose you imagine that you've taken me in."

Venetia's lecture on firmness was brought to an abrupt conclusion by the neat little green garden-door of the neat little house opening.

"Oh, my gosh, Vivien, look who it is!" she cried.

She fled for the house shouting "Penny! Penny! I take back all I said, and I want a chocolate. Penny darling, where are you?"

"Who would have dreamed that it would be here that I should hold you to my heart again, my adored girl?" Dick murmured.

"My dearest, at last, at last," she sighed.

And as they kissed, Penfold's putter which had been left leaning against the neat white garden-seat slowly collapsed on the neat turf in a swoon of outraged conventionality.

Dick Deverell left Penzawn early next morning; but brief though his visit was it won him Carrackoon, and by the middle of September he could write to Vivien and announce that the Palatinate, subject to the approval of three Government offices which had not yet replied, but the replies of which might be expected in the course of the next few weeks, was prepared to grant him a lease of the island for life. Moreover, Penfold had worked things so well that, though the formalities of the lease could hardly be concluded before the Winter quarter if indeed he might not have to wait until Lady Day, he had received permission to take up his residence immediately. The Air Ministry had already managed with the vigour of youth to signify his innocuousness to the bureaucracy of flight, and the Chancellor of the Palatinate had positively admitted that the prospect of his tenancy would not keep him awake at night. Provided Dick would take the risk of finding that he was not a *bête noire* to the Home Office, a bugbear to the War Office, and a skeleton in the cupboards of the Admiralty, Carrackoon was as good as his, subject to the payment of £25 at the end of every quarter and his fulfilment of the conditions of the lease which were designed as much for the promotion of public morality as the service of agriculture. Thus, while he was pledged to keep in good heart any fields that were in good heart when he entered upon his tenancy, he was expressly precluded from opening a disorderly house on the island, or even a casino.

So exactly two years after I first saw the islands, Dick wrote, I shall have jumped ashore on that empty beach, able to say to myself that I am home from the sea. Surely, surely, my dearest, that can only mean that one day we shall jump ashore there together, both of us home from the sea.

30

THE LOAN

Vivien was going to need all the courage that such tokens of fortune's favour as Dick's winning of Carrackoon could give her. The day after she heard from Dick that Carrackoon was his, she received a gloomy letter from her father to say that the luck with which he had begun his play at the public tables had not continued when, in the hope of taking full advantage of such luck, he had rashly as it turned out, but wisely as it seemed at the time, joined a private gaming club. The fact was he could not hope to stand up against the apparently inexhaustible resources of these continental *nouveaux riches*; as the result of this he was almost out of ready money in addition to owing his bank another large overdraft, which he had promised to repay by the middle of October. Tom Bell had written to say that Fuller unquestionably intended to make a business-like offer; but he had not heard from Fuller himself to this effect beyond a rather vague expression of hope that they were going to be able to come to satisfactory terms. What did Vivien herself think? Did she feel convinced that Fuller was willing to enter into a partnership at once? The point was this. If Fuller did not intend to do business it would be better to close down Roon after selling as much of the furniture as would pay off his debts. Tom Bell and Holt could be left there, and arrangements made for a weekly boat from Penzawn. Then Vivien and Venetia could join him in Paris, and they would live quietly and economically abroad for a couple of years until the improvement in European affairs that must come about presently should put his investments right. If, on the other hand, Vivien thought that Fuller genuinely intended business, why, then she was to wire him and he would return at once.

Vivien took her father's letter with her and retired to one of her favourite slopes on the west cliffs where the September sun had already yellowed the sparse and stunted bracken and the parched turf was powdered with blue autumnal squills. It seemed certain that the Cheshire Cat intended to come to terms with her father. In addition to the tractor he had brought to the island what he called a cultiplough. He had brought several hundred yards of park palings and six miles of government wire. He had even brought three ship's

lifeboats which the carpenters were hard at work preparing for the engines he had ready for them. These boats were intended to carry trippers next season. He had given orders to deepen the big well on his own responsibility, and he had certainly been one of the applicants for the lease of Carrackoon. Everything pointed to his intention of coming to terms with the owner of Roon. Tom Bell believed he was in earnest, and though Tom Bell had less imagination than a bollard, he had had so many opportunities of talking over the future of Roon with the Cheshire Cat that his opinion in this case must be worth something. Surely she could telegraph to her father that he ought to come home at once. It was all very well for him to talk like that about selling some of the furniture and living economically abroad until his finances righted themselves. But when had he ever lived economically abroad? It would only mean that he would gamble away any ready money he obtained until he had to sell more furniture. And so it would continue until there was nothing left to sell except the island itself. Moreover, if she and Venetia went to live abroad, that must mean not only the indefinite postponement of her marriage, but also another separation it might be of years. Even if she availed herself of being of age and married Dick against her father's will, to do so would mean the abandonment of Venetia to an impossible kind of existence. The idea of sharing the island with the Cheshire Cat was revolting, but from the moment that the island was hired out to summer trippers it was no longer theirs, and Sir Caleb Fuller was only a particularly objectionable tripper, summing up in himself all the abominations of the class. There would always be places to which he would never penetrate. And there would always be Dick on Carrackoon.

Vivien called the dogs, walked quickly back to the House, and wrote a telegram advising her father to come home at once.

Before the Knight arrived Norman Fuller came up to say good-bye to the girls. He had been invited to stay at one of those country houses, the excellent domestic arrangements of which always gave him so much pleasure to recount.

"A little partridge shooting," he explained. "And then a shot at the pheasants. Our parents ought to have settled their affairs by then. I hope I'll be able to come down to Roon in November and have a try for the wily woodcock, of which I've heard so many yarns from Bell and that funny old man Holt."

Vivien stiffened. She had not expected that the Cheshire Kitten would assume the island was his playground already.

"I thought you all disapproved of shooting," she said.

"The old man does," said Norman Fuller. "But only because he's never handled a gun and wouldn't like to miss a bird. Haven't you noticed that he never plays any game he can't score at?"

That was true. If Sir Caleb played billiards, it was a ridiculous game called 'splosh' at which nobody could fail to score every time he went to the table. If he played patience he had so many rules of his own that he could always defeat the cards. Probably his main reason for wanting to have a golf-course of his own was the right it would give him to frame a special supplement to the rules of the game by which bunkers would lose their sting and hazards their victory. Vivien forgave Norman Fuller his announcement about cocking for his ability to see through the cant of his father's unwillingness to take life.

"Well, good-bye, Vivien," he said, holding her hand much longer than was necessary.

"Good-bye, Mr. Fuller."

"Can't you manage 'Norman' yet?" he asked reproachfully.

"Not if you squeeze my hand like that," she replied angrily.

He tried to look pathetic. But Vivien, regarding this full-blooded, slightly overdressed young man whose neck was at perpetual war with his collar and whose chin would have had to be only a little more prominent to give him the expression of a prize-fighter, perceived no pathos in those dark eyes that were staring with such directness into her own. She was much relieved when he loosed her hand, lighted a fat cigarette, blew through his nostrils a dense bident of smoke, and swaggered from the room.

The next day Sir Morgan Romare came home, and was furious when he found a note from Sir Caleb Fuller to say that he was sure he would not want to be bothered with other people for a day or two, and that he did not propose to intrude on him for a few days, while he took a short tour in the interior of Lyonesse to look at some properties of which he had received particulars. Nor was the Knight's annoyance diminished by a rumour Tom Bell brought back from Penzawn that Lord Helbourne was going to sell him Helbourne Castle and Helbourne Park.

"What's the fellow playing at?" the Knight demanded.

Tom Bell gazed solemnly at his master and declared that Sir Caleb was a hard nut to crack, conveying at the same time an impression of immense respect for the stoutness of Sir Caleb's cranium.

"You seem to have broken your own teeth on him," said the Knight irritably. "Why the deuce did you let him unload all these confounded tractors and things and mess up the well unless you were sure he meant to come in over Roon?"

"I thought you wanted me to do everything he wanted, Sir Morgan. I argued the point once, but he got in such a rage I didn't like to argue any more. I was afraid he'd go off the island. And I knew you didn't want that."

"Well, we can't wait here indefinitely without knowing what he intends to do," the Knight grunted. "I've promised the bank to repay my overdraft on October 15th."

"But you paid the bank back, Sir Morgan."

"This is another."

"So you won't be able to give me a cheque to keep some of them quiet?" Tom Bell asked gloomily. "I've been telling them that you were abroad and couldn't be bothered just now, but they'll be worrying again now you're back."

"I don't want to be told that," the Knight snapped.

"No, Sir Morgan."

"But what's he brought all this stuff here for unless he means business?" the Knight repeated.

"He's very interested in machinery I believe."

"Interested in fiddlesticks! A man doesn't dump all this mechanical rubbish on another man's island because he's interested in machinery. Well, don't sit there looking as if you were assisting at my funeral, Tom Bell. I can't believe he's going to buy Lord Helbourne's place."

"No, Sir Morgan."

"How the deuce do *you* know?"

"No, Sir Morgan."

However, Sir Caleb did not buy Helbourne Park, and on the twenty-eighth of September the launch took him over to the island beaming with the pleasure of meeting his friend again. No sooner had he arrived than he must show the Knight all the little things he had ventured to bring to Roon because he had felt sure that they would be so useful.

"And I do hope you didn't mind the action I took over the well?" he asked earnestly. "But so much hinged on the water supply, as I'm sure you understood."

The Knight did not like to tell his prospective partner that deepening the well was a piece of impudence, because Sir Caleb insisted so

strongly that if he did disapprove he was perfectly willing to pay for the work himself, although it could only be a benefit to the island. He detected beneath all this exudation of benevolence a menace, and he hastily assured Sir Caleb that he quite approved of all he had done. His pride was being ruthlessly galled, but from the moment he had entered into a commercial relationship with this fellow he must expect as much. The main thing now was to get that relationship clearly defined.

"Well, Fuller, I suppose you'll be wanting to have a go at the partnership deeds, eh?"

Sir Caleb looked frightened and vague.

"Oh well, there's a good deal to talk over first, isn't there?" he demurred.

"In that case we ought to begin as soon as possible," the Knight insisted. "What about staying with me tonight and having a really good go at things after dinner? You were to let me know definitely, you remember, by the thirtieth of September."

"Yes, that's why I was so anxious you should come back before," Sir Caleb said. "I knew we would have a great deal to talk over."

"The point is," Sir Morgan said, "I've made arrangements to repay my bank an overdraft on October 15th. So, I should like to know where I am now. And the thirtieth of September was the date in that agreement you drew up."

"But I explained when I drew it up that there was nothing binding on either side of us in that little agreement. I'm sure I made that quite clear. I do hope you didn't misunderstand. I would be dreadfully upset if I thought there had been the tiniest little misunderstanding on that point."

"Well, do you or do you not wish to talk business tonight? I've been back nearly a fortnight, you know."

"Yes, but I didn't like to intrude," Sir Caleb said very humbly. "I planned my little tour round Lyonesse so that you could have a quiet few days to look round by yourself. I've been longing for you to come back. I've been asking every day when you were coming back."

"Then you'll spend the night with me?" Sir Morgan pressed. "And after dinner we'll get down to brass tacks."

Sir Caleb beamed.

"Why, that's quite an expression of mine, Romare. I'm famous for getting down to brass tacks."

The Knight made a mental resolve to banish the words from his own vocabulary for evermore.

Sir Caleb declined champagne at dinner, and his electric smile had never seemed so liable to fuse suddenly. He evidently found the process of getting down to brass tacks a painful one, as if indeed he were getting down to them points upward. In the library the Knight tried to make him sit in his own deep arm-chair, but Sir Caleb earnestly declined that honourable comfort; and in the end the deep arm-chair remained unoccupied, because the Knight felt he should be at a disadvantage with the other sitting bolt upright above him on one of those tall box-chairs.

"Well, Fuller, what about it?" the Knight asked when the coffee and brandy stood between them and his guest after refusing a cigar had lighted an exiguous Virginian cigarette.

"I'm afraid I'm really just exactly where I was in July," Sir Caleb sighed.

The Knight nearly said "Then why the blazes did you bring me back to Roon on a fool's errand?" But he had learnt that the only way with Fuller's slipperiness was to let him slither in his own tracks and not offer a path to slither away from the point at issue. He was on fire with inward rage, but he gave no sign of it and allowed his guest to continue the statement of his position in that soft and plausible pedlar's voice.

"You will remember I told you at Bilkton I couldn't see my way to assume any more financial responsibility until one or two little things had materialised. First of all I explained that I would have to sell the Towers. Well, of course there hasn't really been time to do much about that, and the house is costing me a fortune at present. Then I told you I must sell the yacht. And that I've not managed to do yet. Of course if I continued as managing director of Fuller's Fireworks I could make a great many more thousands a year. But my heart won't allow me to do that. I've got to think of my heart, because I do think health is so important, don't you? Yes, my position is rather grave. In fact I may find myself so poor that I shall have to go back to harness after all," he sighed with self-commiseration. "But of course I'm hoping to struggle through without endangering my health. Then I have a certain amount of property in Australia and Canada, which I'm hoping to sell, but I haven't had very satisfactory news about it, and I'm afraid I will have to send Miss Upcott to see what she can do about selling it. That'll cost me quite a lot. The fares are very high nowadays. Still perhaps next Spring. . . ."

"Next Spring's no use to me," the Knight interposed.

"Oh dear, well, then, I don't know what I can do. I understood from Lieutenant Bell that you were under the impression that I had offered to lend you two thousand pounds at any time, but I expect perhaps he misunderstood you."

"I told him you had offered to lend me a thousand pounds whether you went on with the Roon partnership or not," said the Knight. "I told him that because I thought it would help him to understand that you were. . . ." he stopped. He supposed that it would be tactless to imply that Tom Bell stood in need of some practical demonstration that the partner in prospect was a gentleman.

"Well, you see, when I offered you that loan as a matter of friendship I hoped I would be selling the yacht. I wouldn't like to think I had misled you in any way, and though I couldn't manage anything like a thousand pounds, I dare say I could just manage two hundred pounds if that would be any use to you."

"Two hundred pounds would be as useful as two pence," said the Knight.

Sir Caleb sighed with what he must have intended to sound like disappointment.

"At the same time," he went on, "I don't want you to think that I've given up my idea of entering into our partnership, and I'm quite ready to take an option for five years if you like. Of course I would pay for that. How would it be if I left the three boats here and the tractor and the cultiplough and the little useful odds and ends I've brought? And I'd throw in the *Butterfly's* wireless," he went on enthusiastically. "It isn't working at present. But it only wants a competent electrical engineer to overhaul it. And I do think you ought to have wireless here. I would always make a great point of that if we ever did enter into partnership, because I would always be so worried about illness. My idea would be for everybody to subscribe sixpence a week, and then we could offer the doctor so much a year to come over whenever we sent a wireless message for him. Let me see. Suppose we were employing twenty men at sixpence a week, that would work out to. . . ."

"But what's the use of discussing eventualities now?" the Knight interrupted. "I'm much obliged to you, Fuller, but an option on Roon paid for with material that I don't want and couldn't use would leave me more involved than ever, because it would prevent my letting it or doing any business with anybody else."

"That's why I suggested the option. I wouldn't like to think of your having to take a partner who wouldn't understand how im-

portant it was for you to *enjoy* Roon. That's what *I* want. I don't want Roon for myself, but I do want *you* to be able to enjoy it."

"It's very kind of you, Fuller, but I'm afraid that with my present liabilities I am not likely to enjoy my island much longer even by walking round it."

"Would it . . . could it . . . would you care to let me know just what your liabilities are?" said Sir Caleb emotionally. "Of course I formed some idea of the expense of Roon from Lieutenant Bell's books. I like him. I think he's the best man you've got. Old Holt touches his cap very politely, but he's much too old to be useful any more. And some of your people I don't like at all, if I may say so. They seemed quite unable to understand that I was only asking them questions on your account. I liked Jervis. I was telling him that we had twelve gardeners at Bilkton, and he was very interested."

"My liabilities," the Knight repeated. "Well, roughly I should say that they were about six thousand pounds; but in order to be comfortable I should want eight thousand pounds. To raise that sum I shall have to mortgage Roon, and since you do not intend to make me any offer. . . ."

"It isn't that I don't intend, Romare," Sir Caleb put in earnestly. "Please don't think that. I do intend. I haven't grown to like Roon a bit less, and I believe more than ever in the possibility of developing it. But just at the moment I *can't* make you an offer. If you could just wait till next Spring, I'm almost sure I shall be able to come in with you then. That's why I suggested the option. If you don't think £500 enough, which is what I am estimating the various useful little things are worth, well, I'm prepared to add £100 in cash."

"I've put all my cards on the table, Fuller. I've told you that I have to repay a heavy overdraft on October 15th. I have various liabilities in Penzawn as you know. I want money, not wireless sets and tractors."

"Oh dear," Sir Caleb moaned, "how distressing this is! What can I do? I do *wish* I could do something. I was talking to Norman about it. He *was* so sorry he had to go away before you arrived, and he was hoping to come back in November. I think the girls invited him to come and shoot woodcocks or something."

The Knight frowned. They might have let one autumn go by. How quickly people were forgotten! Yes, they might have let one more November go past.

"And Norman is most anxious that we should come to Roon. In fact he's so anxious that when I explained to him my difficulties about finding a large sum of ready money he suggested that I could use the money I put in trust for him. I do so believe in giving a young man some idea of money, but not too much. So I put £10,000 in trust for him, the interest on which is his allowance. Of course, I would have to consult him; but if he was agreeable, something might be managed. My idea—though of course I don't know if Norman will agree, but my idea was that I might lend you this £8,000 and take an option on Roon say for five years. Would you consider that?"

"Yes, I'd consider that," said the Knight, after a moment's hesitation, during which all the money he owed surged in a great stream of gold across his vision.

"Oh, would you? Oh well, then perhaps we shall be able to manage something after all. Have you a piece of paper you could lend me? I'd like just to work out the rough details of the transaction."

The Knight gave him paper; but Sir Caleb took his own gold pencil set with a ruby to conjure with. Suddenly to the Knight's surprise he was sprawling full length on the floor like a great fat baby playing with bricks.

"Do you mind if I lie down on my tummy like this just to work out the details?" he looked up to plead with a winning smile. "Whenever I get very interested in anything I always lie down on the floor like this. I always have."

As the only thing in which Sir Caleb took any real interest was money, and as he was greedier for that than a dog for meat, perhaps he actually did crave for money with his stomach and sprawled upon it like this to quell the windy rumbles of hunger.

"I don't like mixing up friendship and business," he burbled, coming to the surface as if he were a porpoise to take a deep breath of sentimental oxygen before he dipped down again into the dense atmosphere of figures. "The one is so apt to spoil the other."

The Knight thought to himself that he could give a good guess which was the one that would get more severely damaged in the encounter.

"Oh, you must treat this purely as a matter of business," he begged, casting a cold abhorrent eye on the moist lips that were sucking the tip of the pencil as if it were of barley-sugar.

"Yes, I'm afraid we will have to," said Sir Caleb sadly. "You

see, the trouble is that it isn't really my own money. And I would have to safeguard Norman."

"I perfectly understand that."

"Well now, you told me that £8,000 would be sufficient. But if we are going to develop Roon, you will want some extra money to make a few alterations at once. I think the golf-links should be begun at once, and I'm quite sure that we ought to have the cottages which were used as barracks done up and turned into tea-rooms and a club-house. Then, supposing I cannot manage to take up the option in the Spring, you will want to feel able to carry on comfortably. Suppose I was to lend you all of Norman's £10,000?"

"Why, I've no doubt that £10,000 wouldn't be a bit too much," the Knight agreed. Now that his quest was beginning to get beyond threepenny packets of shells and the profits on penny-in-the-slot lavatories he began to think that he wasn't such a bad fellow after all, though it still embarrassed him rather to see the way he was rolling about voluptuously on the hearthrug and sucking his pencil and covering the notepaper with figures.

"Then there arises the question of repayment and security," Sir Caleb went on. "Now, what can you offer me? Of course, if it were my own money I wouldn't bother about security, and you could repay me at your own convenience. But I'm bound to safeguard Norman's interests. Do you think you could repay me in ten half-yearly instalments of £1,000? Say that you receive my cheque for £10,000 on October 14th. That would mean you would have to repay me £1,000 on April 14th and every six months the same amount."

The Knight thought for a moment. He could keep some of the borrowed money in hand for the first instalment. The second instalment might be met by profits on Roon. Or at any rate by the profits on Roon plus a small overdraft. And the third instalment? Well, no doubt by then the general financial situation would be so much better that he should have plenty of money again. Besides, by that time his creditor would surely have arranged to enter into a partnership.

"Oh yes," he said, "I think that would be quite a reasonable arrangement."

"I'm glad," said Sir Caleb solemnly. "Because you do understand, don't you, that I'm only doing this to help you in every way. Then there's the interest. Norman is getting an average of six per cent on his money at present, so that I'm afraid I couldn't very well ask you to pay less, could I? I wouldn't like him to lose

over this generous impulse of his. It might embitter him as Mr. Lammam embittered me. So on April 14th you would repay £1,000 of the principal and pay £300 of interest. That's quite clear, isn't it? But you'd always be having the pleasure of thinking that with every instalment you paid off the interest would be decreasing. For instance, on October 14th next year you'd only have to pay £270 of interest, and the following April only £240!" He threw down the sheet of notepaper and sat up crosslegged on the hearthrug with an encouraging smile. "And now there's the question of security," he whispered gently. "Security," he cooed almost erotically.

Somehow it was Dives who seemed to have reached Abraham's bosom this time; and there he was nestling now in a very rapture of bliss.

"I suppose the best security I can offer you is Roon itself," the Knight said.

"By the way, I did say, didn't I, that I would want a five years' option on Roon if I lent you this money? I don't think that's too much to ask, do you? Of course, I've no doubt whatever that I will take up the option long before that. But as it will take you five years to repay the loan, I think it would be fair to let me have five years to make up my mind, though, as I say, it's practically impossible that I won't have sold the yacht or Bilkton or realized any of my other properties by then."

"What about your interest in Fuller's Fireworks?"

Sir Caleb's grey eyes dilated.

"Oh, but I never speculate with any money I receive from my interest in the firm. And Roon is quite a speculation from my point of view. I hope you won't misunderstand me when I say that. Anything I'm able to do over Roon must depend on my selling the yacht or Bilkton or . . ."

"Yes, yes, I understand," interrupted the Knight, who was growing to hate that catalogue of potential increments.

"If you don't want to offer Roon as a security," Sir Caleb suggested, "perhaps you have some other securities you could lodge with me?"

"No, no," said the Knight hastily. "The best security will be Roon itself, or perhaps my furniture, which must be worth a great deal more than what you are lending me."

"I do hope you are not being too optimistic about that," said Sir Caleb, getting up on his feet and gazing round the library disparagingly. "Of course I'm not a connoisseur as I told you, but I

do know that there's a dreadful difference between buying and selling."

"I didn't buy much of this," said the Knight.

"It's very difficult," Sir Caleb sighed gently. "You see, I wouldn't like to ask you to give me a bill of sale, because, as I dare say you know, a bill of sale is published in the *Gazette*, and it's rather apt to destroy a man's credit." He pondered a moment. "Still, you might sign a covenant to give me a bill of sale if you were in default with either the interest on or the instalments of the principal."

"Very well, very well," said the Knight impatiently.

"I will have to take the risk," Sir Caleb moaned.

"But good gracious, Fuller, the furniture and trappings and one thing and another on Roon are worth a very great deal more than £10,000 on the most conservative estimate."

"Well, as I'm only doing this out of friendship," Sir Caleb said, "I'm willing to take the risk. We'd better get the terms of the option drawn up and signed in Penzawn, and then I'm afraid I will have to ask you to come to town to sign the other documents. I'd rather my own solicitor managed that business, though he's going to be very cross with me for risking Norman's money like this. Mr. Honey, his name is, and I believe him to be one of the smartest solicitors anywhere. Now, with regard to the option, I've been thinking things over very carefully, and I don't think you ought to give me an option on your furniture. Of course, if later on we found that it would be a good thing to turn your house into an hotel, all this old furniture would be a great attraction to the class of visitor we might expect to get here. But I don't want to tie you down to doing something you mightn't like. So I propose to put £10,000 as the price of the island without your house and the contents and the gardens, but including the farm-buildings, inn, and various cottages. That would mean that I would pay £5,000 to become half owner, for which I would have the right to reserve the Inn for my own house, and of course pay any expenses necessary to convert it into a suitable residence. I wouldn't like to think you were selling the house where you and your family had lived for such a long time. Then I would propose to have the farm-stuff and stock and everything valued and pay half of whatever it was valued at on taking up my option. I don't fancy it will be valued at more than £2,000. Of course I may be wrong, and I hope very much for your sake that I am wrong. Naturally anything I had to pay would be set against any money you still owe me. And of course my tractors and life-

boats and wireless will be put in as the £500 I pay for this option, so that £500 will also have to be deducted from anything I pay you. Then I would like to store here all my things on board the yacht, at my own risk of course, except from thieves, which would be your risk. And anything else I send down from time to time I would like to stipulate should be stored here. And then with regard to the immediate improvements like the golf-course and the turning of the barracks into a club-house and several other little things. I'm naturally quite willing to pay for half of them at cost price when I take up the option."

"But meanwhile," the Knight objected, "I shall be paying you interest on improvements from which you will benefit."

"Yes, but if by any chance I couldn't take up the option till the end of my five years," said Sir Caleb in the accents of a martyr, "I would be buying old buildings at the price they cost when new. And if I found—as I do hope I won't find—that I never *can* take up the option I wouldn't get any advantage from the improvements. Oh, and the deepening of the well will be put in at cost price, and of course I will pay half of that."

The option was drawn up and signed before the prospective partner left Penzawn. It struck the Knight after he had affixed his signature that he only had Fuller's word that the other transaction would go through. A week's silence from London began to make him feel anxious; but exactly six days before he was due to repay his overdraft news came that all was ready if he would be kind enough to come up and sign the necessary documents in connexion with the loan.

The final proceedings opened with a lunch in the National Liberal Club at which Norman was present. The Knight, like his daughters, found the young man so much less objectionable than he had anticipated that he was inclined to wonder if after all he had not done the father an injustice and if this loan of £10,000 out of money held in trust for the son might not be a genuine expression of the son's interest in Roon. Sir Caleb was pressing with the champagne, and on this occasion drank a certain amount himself.

"I was saying to Norman that when we begin our partnership, Romare, he'll have to work hard. I've given him a lot of advantages that I never had myself. One day I'll tell you the history of my beginnings. I had an elder brother who treated my poor father very badly and ran away from home. So my father offered me his place in the office if I liked to leave school at once. I was getting on

splendidly at school, but I felt I ought to help my father as he wanted me, and though I sometimes regret the way my education was cut off short I've always been glad that I came forward when my dear father needed me. I think Norman will have an ideal job, managing our little enterprise, especially if we have the hotel. You know I've been thinking over that little scheme, and what an ideal place such an hotel would be! We would get everybody to come there. Think what a boon it would be for politicians to get right away from the toil and moil of modern life to a lovely little place like Roon. And when we've tidied it up a bit Roon will be even lovelier. You'll see that one of the stipulations I've made in regard to the preliminary expenditure is that you should proceed immediately to erect a coal-gas plant down there by the harbour. I feel sure that one of the first things we want on the island are lamp-posts. However, I may want to suggest installing petrol-gas instead. I'm going into the specifications now. And then we badly require a larger crane, because until we have a larger crane I can't land the tank for the sea-weed. In fact before we've finished I hope we shall have turned Roon into quite a mechanical island which *will* be such an improvement. I'm going into the question of using motor lorries instead of horses. *Do* have some more champagne!"

The invitation was prompted by the look of dismay on the Knight's countenance at the prospect that was being unfolded before him.

"It's rather a small place you know for a number of mixed noises," he said. "And I'm afraid I'm no lover of machinery."

Sir Caleb smiled compassionately.

"Still, once you decide to develop a place it has to be done thoroughly. People expect it nowadays. There's another question that will arise when we have our hotel—the telephone."

"Telephone?" the Knight gasped. "Why, I never use a telephone even in London. I hope you won't start telephoning to me, Fuller. It seems to me a most disgusting habit. And a telephone on Roon! Surely one of the pleasures of a place like Roon is the absence of telephones?"

"As it is now, perhaps," said Sir Caleb. "Though even now I think it would be a great convenience if you could telephone over to Penzawn for what you wanted. You're entirely at the mercy of your boatmen at present."

"That's one of the charms of living on an island. Why live on an island and turn it into a suburb?"

"Ah, if you could live there entirely for your own pleasure, I dare

say you wouldn't have to bother about improvements. But I've been meaning to tell you how wise I think you are to realize that conditions have changed nowadays and that people can't live in places entirely for their own pleasure any longer. I think that's one of the great signs of progress, the way that nowadays we want other people to share our pleasures."

"At a price," the Knight said dryly.

"Everything and everybody has a price," said Sir Caleb. "I never yet met anybody who did anything for nothing, and if he did he was no good for anything. I used to give people pleasure with my fireworks, but they didn't expect me not to charge for them. They wouldn't have believed they were good if I'd given them away. And they would have been right," Sir Caleb added decidedly.

The Knight saw no advantage in pursuing the argument. He viewed the future with the profoundest misgivings. He wished he had never seen Sir Caleb Fuller with his coal-gas and lorries and telephones and broken-down wireless equipment. But he had gone too far to draw back now. The option was signed and sealed, and it would be foolish to frighten him off the loan.

"I've asked my solicitor to lunch to-morrow," Sir Caleb was saying. "He will bring the covenant for the bill of sale and the various conditions of the loan all properly engrossed. By the way we never discussed who was to pay for the necessary stamps. Perhaps it would be best to share the legal expenses."

"Just as you like," the Knight agreed with a yawn.

He was growing tired of Fuller's electric smile and the silent bull-necked son and the porcelain tiles of the National Liberal Club, especially as the ceremony was apparently to be repeated to-morrow with a smart lawyer instead of the silent bull-necked son.

After lunch he walked wearily along the Embankment by himself in the mellow October sunlight. He was feeling very old this afternoon. And as he paused to lean over the parapet and watch the barges going down on the ebb he shivered, for it seemed to him that Roon was going down on the ebb like them. Was he doing right in accepting this loan? Could he trust Fuller's decency? What about Vivien and Venetia? At the worst they would only lose some of the furniture, and if he should die they could pay back the loan at once if they chose. Thank God, with all his difficulties he had not yielded to temptation and broken the promise he made to Margherita by pledging that last security. This £10,000 would be a great boon. £3,000 to the bank. That left £7,000. Another £3,000 for various

debts. £1,000 put aside for the first instalment next April. £3,000 to carry on at Roon and pay for those alterations that Fuller wanted. Perhaps he could get away for a month after Christmas when with any luck he might turn that £3,000 into £20,000.

Sir Caleb provided plenty of champagne next day in order to help the Knight to recover from the document with which he and his smart solicitor had tied him up as with a tourniquet. He found that if he was ever in default with the interest or with one instalment he was immediately to give his creditor a bill of sale on all his personal property. He found too that he was straitly bound to apply the money for the purpose for which it was lent. He was to satisfy Fuller not only that he was proceeding with the stipulated alterations, but also that he was paying for them. He had to satisfy him by January that he had paid all his personal debts. Now, some of these debts were so-called debts of honour, and the Knight realized that when he had paid these in addition to his debts to tradesmen and the current expenses of the island he should have a very great deal less than the £3,000 he had optimistically allowed himself. He looked at the documents and hesitated.

"This is rather stiffer than I expected, Fuller, for a friendly loan," he said.

"I was afraid you'd think I was being rather a Jew," said Sir Caleb sorrowfully. "That's why I didn't want to mix up business with friendship. But as it was Norman's money I couldn't do anything else, could I? And after all it won't ever be to my interest to drive you too hard, will it? I must simply protect Norman's interests in case anything happens to me before the loan is repaid."

"What if anything happens to me before then?" the Knight asked.

"I think that's provided for," Sir Caleb pointed out. "You'll remember that the option was binding on your heirs and assigns until it expires. And of course they would be equally responsible for the repayment of this money. Won't you have another glass of champagne?"

The Knight threw one cold glance of dislike at the smug chinning tradesman, then dipped his pen and signed. And as he wrote, age twitched at his sleeve so that his signature sprawled feebly at the foot of the document.

31

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

While the Knight was away in London Dick Deverell arrived to take up his abode on Carrackoon accompanied by Grimmer, an ex-batman of his in the Army, to whom he was indebted for much good fellowship in difficult and dangerous times, and for whom he had a deep affection. Grimmer was a stocky little man of many talents and inexhaustible interests, which made him a particularly suitable companion on a small island demanding both. His bright dark eyes under a pair of very bushy and much arched black eyebrows twinkled approbation of his future home when he and Dick landed on the beach.

"Well, it's a long sight bigger than what I thought it was going to be," he admitted. "When you pointed it out to me coming along in the train I thought we'd look like a couple of caterpillars on a spring cabbage living there."

Dick had had a successful interview with his trustees, whom he had managed to persuade to let him apply a thousand pounds of his capital toward renovating and furnishing his house and stocking the island with bulbs when the time came. His war gratuity, which amounted to well over two hundred pounds, was still intact, and, altogether he felt full of prosperity and hope. He had bought a boat that resembled the *Undine*—equipped, however, with a 5-h.p. motor. The German conchologist's moorings had been left undisturbed ever since he was taken away, and the *Melusine* was now riding at them, as much at home as if she had never known others. Dick had been a little doubtful about the motor after the letters he had been getting from Vivien and Venetia about the Cheshire Cat's lust for machinery. But since neither Grimmer nor he could be considered expert mariners, although Grimmer prophesied with his usual confidence that given a week he'd sail the *Meelewsign* for a week-end in Paris, he had decided on motor transport, of which Grimmer had had some experience.

Just before the *Anna Maria* left Penzawn with the first cargo, the launch put off from the *Butterfly*, in which a female figure was seen to be making signals with a handkerchief.

"What on earth do they want?" Dick exclaimed.

The skipper of the *Anna Maria* shook his head and spat.

"They're always wanting something," he said gloomily.

The launch drew alongside, and the female in the stern asked if she could speak to the gentleman who had just taken Carrackoon; on which Dick came forward and revealed himself.

"Oh, I'm Sir Caleb Fuller's secretary," she announced genteelly, "and I was wondering if you would care to buy some boxes of Quaker Oats which we have on board and which we shall not be requiring now."

The skipper dug Dick in the ribs warningly and growled a negative.

"No, thanks very much," Dick told her.

"I only thought they might be useful to you," she exclaimed indignantly. "Good morning."

The launch sheered off again at once, but not before the steersman of it had winked profoundly at the skipper of the *Anna Maria*.

"Why on earth should that woman want to sell me boxes of Quaker Oats?"

"Because they've gone rotten," said the skipper. "The sea-water or something got into 'em, and they've been trying to sell 'em to all the grocers round Penzawn. Then they tried to sell 'em to some of the farmers. Then the chap as owns the yacht tried giving 'em away to the kids, but the police stopped that. Sir Caleb Fuller!" he concluded meditatively. "Well, it takes all sorts to make this world. Leggo that rope there, you boy!" he shouted fiercely as he took the helm.

Good weather blessed the new tenant's arrival, so that the *Anna Maria* was able to bring over in a couple of trips all that he required for the present, which included a camp outfit for two, various kitchen utensils and garden tools, a variety of tinned stores, two tables, a bookshelf, a couple of armchairs, and a pair of goats, at milking which Grimmer professed himself an adept. As a matter of fact, the goats were not a success.

"Something must have gone wrong with their works coming over," he declared. "Anyway, I couldn't get enough milk to wet a postage stamp, not from the pair of 'em together. They sucked me in a bit at first by standing so quiet while I was trying. It seemed as if *they* thought as there was plenty of milk there. But after I'd been pumping for a quarter-of-an-hour the white one turned nasty. 'You mind out, young madam,' I said, 'or you'll wake up one morning and find yourself a hearthrug.' And just then the one like a shaving-

brush got me fair in the middle of my Hindenburg line, and I give up. They're in the kitchen now, eating the wallpaper where it's peeling off. Well, if we don't get any milk to-morrow, we may get a pint of white-wash and I'll be able to start in on the ceilings."

Penfold had begged Dick not to begin doing up the house until the formalities of the lease were concluded. So for the moment he and Grimmer occupied themselves with digging the garden and, when that was finished, starting to break up the southerly of the two fields on the summit of the island. However, not much work of any kind was done by Dick that first week, because, with their father away, the girls came over very often, and Dick had some wonderful talks with Vivien about the future while Venetia was initiating Grimmer into various mysteries of insular life. One day she and he went over to Penzawn to buy poultry and take back the goats to the man who had sold them, leaving Dick and Vivien to enjoy the island by themselves.

"It's not quite yet the absolute anniversary of the blessed day we met," he said. "But it was just such another October day as this. The lilies are out again, and hark at the bees in the ivy bloom, and look at the Red Admirals. I think we deserve these golden days. And if we can't always meet during this winter, we shall be able to see each other every day. We shall be like Hero and Leander on either side of the Hellespont. You'll come to Rosevean and I'll stand on the cliffs here above the Lion rock, and the gulls will fly backwards and forwards between us."

"Every morning and every afternoon," she vowed.

"Unless it's terrifically stormy," he suggested very doubtfully.

"What do I care about storms so long as I can see you?" she asked.

"Ah, I hoped you'd think that. But, dearest, we must not be too content with looking at each other across the Hellespont. I thought I wouldn't try to say anything more to your father this Winter. I thought we'd let him get used to the idea of my being fixed on Carrackoon. I'll be working all the while to make the island ready for you, and then one morning in Spring I'll sail the *Melusine* into Roon and go boldly up the hill and demand his daughter's hand. Vivien, why shouldn't we be married next June?"

"If we only could be!"

"Then, let's decide that we will. Let's vow that before the roses I plant this Autumn are in bloom we'll be married."

"Perhaps we might be," she sighed wistfully.

"Oh, but you must believe we shall," he cried, straining her to his heart. "You must believe that on some afternoon in June, more golden than this afternoon, when the tide is very high, we'll leave the *Melusine* at her moorings and row ashore in the cockle and walk up to the garden-door and open it and find the garden full of sunlight and roses and butterflies. We'll have tea under the mulberry, and we'll sit there not bothering about the time or the falling tide, because it won't matter then if the *Melusine* is left high and dry on the sand. And it won't matter then about getting back to Roon in time for something or other. Nothing will matter then, heart of my heart. And dusk will fall, and I shall say to you 'Come into our house, my sweet.' And there'll be candles lighted on the dinner-table and roses everywhere, and after dinner the full moon will be hanging over the top of the wood and we'll walk out together round our island. We'll hear the sea-pies fluting and watch the sands getting wider and the rocks coming out of the water like seals as the tide goes down. We'll sit for awhile in the little wood and watch the foxgloves standing up black against the moon along the edge of it. And then we'll go home by the lane along the big wood, and there'll be a smell of dewy bracken and honeysuckle as we go, and first you'll be thinking that you ought to be back in Roon because it's so late, and then you'll be knowing that you'll never have to go back again; and we'll be at the garden wall by then, and the smell of the pinks will come up to us from below and I'll take your hand and say 'My sweet one, we've come home.'"

"Oh, Dick, Dick, will it ever be like that?"

"Unless my pinks damp off this winter," he laughed.

And for the rest of that October afternoon they wandered through their future as golden lovers wander through a long arras bedight with birds and flowers. The time that passed dropped behind them as imperceptibly as high up in the mulberry-tree the yellow leaves spun down to earth through the still weather. They sat, aureoled by this serenity of air, rapt in a dream where clocks were mute and where all that entered from the world without was the perfume of those crimson lilies mingled with the moist scents of the autumnal woodland and the blue reek of a bonfire's smoke.

At last they heard coming up the lane from the beach a great clucking of fowls and quacking of ducks, with Venetia's laugh ringing out over all. There was only time for each to vow once more to the other never to lose faith that when June came they would be married. As their lips drew apart from the kiss that consecrated this

resolve, the garden-door burst open, and there was Venetia's red-brown hair framed in the doorway and her bright eyes regarding them across that sunny space of air threaded with ambient gossamers.

"We've got two new goats," she proclaimed triumphantly. "The others *were* dry. I knew they must be."

"Miss Veneecher put it properly across the fellow as sold us them two," said Grimmer. "But these is all right. All right these is. We tried milking 'em on the way over, and a soda-fountain couldn't have worked better."

"And we've got six runner ducks," Venetia went on.

"Beautiful," Grimmer apostrophized. "There's ducks and ducks. But these is ducks."

"And six white Minorcas," she added.

"White as lather," said Grimmer enthusiastically. "Walking snow-balls."

"Oh, and Vivien, there was a telegram at the post-office, and Father's coming back to-morrow," she concluded.

The Knight found in the presence of Dick Deverell on Carrackoon an excuse to get rid of some of the pent up irritation of his days in London with Fuller and that smart solicitor.

"What on earth is Penfold thinking about?" he demanded. "I'll write and give him a piece of my mind. I consider it most unfriendly of him to connive at this fellow's having Carrackoon."

"You didn't really want the Cheshire Cat to have it?" Venetia exclaimed contemptuously.

"It would have been more suitable," said the Knight.

"Oh pish!" she ejaculated. "He didn't appreciate it. He wanted to grow poisonous plants there, if he couldn't use it for filthy trippers."

"Don't speak to me like that, Venetia. And don't call Sir Caleb by that ridiculous nickname. He has just laid me under a great obligation, and I insist on your treating him civilly."

"You haven't had his smile all the Summer," Venetia retorted. "You wait till you've seen a bit more of him. You'll be calling him something much worse than Cheshire Cat in a minute. He'll have a jolly sight more out of you than you ever get out of him."

"I'm not discussing Sir Caleb at this moment. What I want both you girls to understand quite clearly is that I absolutely forbid your going over to Carrackoon. And I won't have this fellow Deverell on Roon. Do you understand that, Vivien?"

"Yes, I understand."

"Well, don't stand there saying nothing! You know it always irritates me."

"You're jolly difficult to please," Venetia protested. "I *mustn't* talk, and Vivien *must*, and . . ."

"Get out of this room, you little vixen," he shouted, and banged the table with his fist.

"I won't get out," she said. "And if you bang your fist at me, I'll stamp my foot at you. And I'll say what I've been wanting to say all the Summer. You've brought the Cheshire Cat to Roon, and you've got to look after him. Vivien and I are sick of him. We think he's a blot on the landscape. We think he'd rob a blind man of his last penny. We think he's a greasy, hypocritical glutton. He's not your partner yet, and we hope he never will be. How you dare say you'd rather this smarmy profiteer had Carrackoon than Dick Deverell I simply don't know. You wait till the Summer comes and the Cheshire Cat suggests it would be quite a good idea to charge twopence a head for trippers to see you eat your lunch. Just you wait, Father dear. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if he suggested wheeling you round in a green and yellow barrow like that poor seal they wheeled round in Penzawn and charging the trippers a penny each to stroke your moustache."

"Venetia! Venetia! You oughtn't to talk like that. Come along," Vivien said, pulling her sister out of the room. Although the Knight might have been supposed to be sitting paralysed by temper at the way his younger daughter had been speaking to him, he was really not angry, for all that she had been saying had been like a balm, since it expressed precisely what he would have liked to say about the fellow himself.

It was a pity that he did not take his daughters more fully into his confidence, for had he done so he would have had their support for believing what in his own heart he believed about his creditor's motive for lending him the £10,000. But through telling them nothing about that he felt bound to defend himself against their criticism of his weakness by maintaining his obligation to Fuller, and in doing this he was continually assuring himself that he was under an obligation. He writhed under Fuller's attitude of benevolence and longed to point out to him that this expression of friendship was nothing more than a very clever stroke of business. But Fuller himself was so utterly convincing when he asseverated friendship as his sole motive that the Knight felt he ought not to

accept £10,000 and call a man a liar. To justify himself for what he had done he tried to think that he would never have done it unless he had supposed that the loan was an expression of pure goodwill. In fact, when he returned to Roon he wrote to Fuller a most cordial letter thanking him warmly for the loan and declaring his profound faith in the ultimate success of their partnership when the moment was ripe for him to take up the option.

Thank you very much for all the nice things you say, Fuller wrote back. Like you I feel the greatest confidence in our little plans for the improvement of Roon. I do hope that Bell is hurrying on with the larger crane which I suggested should be put up on the quay. I cannot send the tank for the sea-weed until there are proper conveniences for landing it. Besides, it is most important to hurry on with the work of putting the "barracks" in order for a clubhouse, dormy-house, and tea-rooms, and it will help with the unloading of material. By the way, you will remember my speaking to you about the advantage of getting some orphan boys from a home who could be apprenticed to different people on the island and learn useful trades. I have been talking to the superintendent of one of these homes. You would have to board the boys and pay them 5s. a week pocket-money—of which 3s. would be kept back to provide them with clothes. In about four years time these orphan boys will be really useful, and then you could get rid of some of your older people, to whom I cannot help feeling you are paying a great deal more than they are worth. We shall want a lot of young blood when Roon is developed. As soon as I hear from you that you agree with my plan I will have the articles of apprenticeship sent to you to sign. I suggest one orphan for Holt, one for Hockin the mason, one for Rawlings the carpenter, one for the boatman, one for Bell, one for Jervis, and of course Willett, my engineer, who is looking forward to arriving next week, will want one. If you will telegraph me that you agree, Willett can bring the seven orphans down with him.

But the prospect of training orphans was too much for the Knight. He wrote firmly to say that he could not undertake such a responsibility. He longed to write and refuse the services of Willett as well, whom he did not trust and whom he regarded as a spy acting for Fuller; but he had given his promise to employ this man and he supposed he could not go back on his word.

The Knight's refusal to accept the seven orphans brought Sir Caleb down to Roon. But the Knight resisted all his arguments.

"No, Fuller, I cannot make myself responsible for orphans until you take up your option. I should never care for the idea, but if you were here to look after them I might withdraw my opposition. Until then I do not propose to make any changes of that kind. I shall probably go abroad after Christmas, and I should not care to leave these boys in charge of Bell."

"You're not thinking of going away?" Sir Caleb exclaimed.

"Why not?"

"Well, Romare, I hope you won't misunderstand what I'm going to say, because it is so easy to misunderstand things sometimes, and I would be heart-broken if I thought for a moment that our business relations could possibly interfere with a friendship such as I feel for you. As you know, I have done everything I could to see you through a difficult time, and so please, please don't misunderstand me when I say that I would regard your going abroad and leaving the island at this critical stage in its development as a breach of your moral obligation to me."

The Knight whitened with rage.

"Breach of moral obligation," he stammered. "What the . . ." He stopped himself by a great effort. If he told this fellow what he really thought of him it would put an end to the partnership, and that would mean losing Roon sooner or later. He held the option, so that he could not deal with anybody else. So long as he owed him a halfpenny of that £10,000 he could not by the terms of the agreement sell one stick from Roon. The only chance to repay him was for Fuller to take up that option. The Knight swallowed the insult. When Tom Bell and Siddle and Jervis and one or two others saw him next, they thought that the Knight was looking old and ill. And each of them began to ponder the best way to ingratiate himself with Sir Caleb Fuller. Others like Holt and Hamblyn and Sam Hockin noticed that the Knight was ageing fast, but they hated Sir Caleb Fuller as the cause of it, so that whenever and wherever any of them could make himself unpleasant to him he did so. Sir Caleb bided his time. There were moments when in a temper he was inclined to forgo the advantages of waiting by taking up the option at once, merely for the pleasure of getting rid of what he considered a set of idle and insolent old rascals. But the time must soon come when his friend was in default, and Sir Caleb licked his lips at the thought of the conditions he would presently impose. He still liked his friend very much indeed in spite of the ungrateful way he had behaved over the orphans; but

he felt no necessity to like old idiots like Holt, and it would be a real help to poor Romare to help him rid himself of these lazy and presumptuous hangers-on.

The Knight had to find some excuse for swallowing that insult, and he found it in the presence of Dick Deverell on Carrackoon. He worked himself up into a belief that it was the need for protecting Vivien against this fellow which was the cause of his inability to go abroad after Christmas and apply what was left of Fuller's money to a grand coup. Dick Deverell stood for the Knight as the direct cause of his son's death. He was for him the personification of the war. Indeed he almost persuaded himself that if Dick Deverell had never come to Roon, Murdo would have had the post of commandant there. Fuller had contrived a safe job for his son. He should have been able to do the same for Murdo if Deverell had not been on the spot. It was of course a completely irrational train of thought, but contingencies had occupied so much of the Knight's mind since early boyhood that now in old age he had room for nothing else. Deverell was the unexpected horse that ran after all and turned what should have been a really good win into a heavy loss. Deverell was the cursed 'natural' that lost him that big pool. And all his suppressed hatred of Sir Caleb Fuller, all his inward loathing of tractors and cranes, all the damage to his pride inflicted by the present situation found an outlet in a blind resentment against Deverell. The refusal of Fuller's application for the lease of Carrackoon was to his distorted mind the refusal of his own, and when he was feeling most indignant with Fuller he could always manage to salve his own feelings by agreeing that the letting of Carrackoon to Deverell was an atrocious injustice. Sir Caleb was clever enough to realize that if he could eliminate Dick Deverell from Carrackoon he should by doing so obtain an ascendancy over the Knight that all his money would never give him. If he could oust Deverell, he should have no difficulty in kicking after him Holt and the rest of the old fossils who were incapable of appreciating what he had done, what he was doing, and what he intended to do for Roon. On the subject of Deverell's disgraceful intrusion Sir Morgan and Sir Caleb were in perfect accord, and if ever Sir Caleb went too far with some suggested improvement he could always divert the Knight's annoyance to the thought of Carrackoon.

"I think before I go away this time, Romare, it might be advisable to ask that young man over here and let me talk to him about sub-letting," he suggested.

"Nothing will induce me to let him land on this island," the Knight averred.

Sir Caleb looked at the placid sea and the pale blue sky of Martintide.

"Do you know, I've a very good mind to go over and make him a proposition?" he said. "I shall be away now till some time in January, and if we are going to include Carrackoon in our development schemes we ought to know as soon as possible. Of course, the new lease will have to be taken out in my name owing to the absurd prejudice against your having the island. But we can settle up over that privately. It's only £100 a year, though I may have to offer him a small premium to sub-let. I daresay he'll be glad enough to pick up £50 for nothing. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that his lease has not been signed yet, and I interviewed Mr. Penfold on the subject. I'm sorry to say he was inclined to be rather rude to me, though I hinted very strongly that it might be to his advantage if some objection was taken to this young man by the authorities."

"Penfold used to be a decent sensible fellow," said the Knight. "But this upstart seems to have got the soft side of him somehow."

"Yes, I told Mr. Penfold I couldn't understand at all why my application had been passed over in favour of this young man. I said I couldn't understand why the Palatinate should prefer to let Carrackoon to a nobody rather than to a man in my position. And Mr. Penfold said to me quite abruptly, 'We don't pay any attention to money however much, or titles however new in the Palatinate, my good sir.' 'My good sir!' he actually called me. 'My good sir!' And when I told him I wasn't accustomed to being spoken to like that, he rang the bell for his clerk and said, 'I think you'll find your hat in the outer office.' I shall take the first opportunity I have of passing a few remarks on Mr. Penfold's administration when I'm in London," Sir Caleb concluded, his grey eyes hard as granite pebbles now. "And if I can ever help to break Mr. Penfold, I will."

That afternoon Grimmer who was digging the lower field on the right of the lane leading to the house was hailed by Sir Caleb Fuller.

"No, we don't want no lobsters," said Grimmer, surveying the magnate over his spade from the top of the bank. "Any lobsters we want here we gets ourselves. See what I mean, Father Nepchune? So, 'ook it. Go on, don't argue. 'Op it back to the briny as quick as you like. Hear what I say?"

There was some excuse for Grimmer's attitude, because in order to negotiate the horrors of the Carrackoon landing Sir Caleb had donned high rubber boots, a yellow sou'wester, a complete suit of yellow oilskins, and a stout alpenstock.

"I'm Sir . . ." he was beginning, when Grimmer broke in sternly:

"Didn't I tell you not to argue? Go on, Tom Bowling. O.F. off, that's you. Britannia rules the waves, perraps. But she don't rule this island. Why, it 'ud make a pirate-king feel sea-sick just to look at you," he declared indignantly.

"I'm Sir Caleb Fuller and I wish to see Mr. Deverell. I've just come over from Roon in Sir Morgan Romare's boat."

Grimmer scratched his head doubtfully.

"Well, I suppose it's all right. What name did you say?"

Sir Caleb repeated his name with that chasmy smile, which always signified his intention to do business with somebody.

Grimmer jumped down into the lane from the bank and led the way to the house.

"You find it a bit quiet here, I expect?" the visitor suggested.

"No, sir. I'm a single man. So I'm used to quiet."

"But I expect you'll soon get tired of it?" said Sir Caleb hopefully.

Grimmer did not bother to reply to this except by quickening his steps. When he reached the garden-door he asked Sir Caleb to wait while he went to find Mr. Deverell.

Dick was down in the Close working at the borders under the low walls.

"There's somebody calling himself Sir Caleb Fuller outside, sir. He looks more like the Yellow Peril, but I think it's him all right."

"What on earth does he want?"

"Well, sir, I don't know, but from what I've heard in Penzawn he's going round looking for somebody who'll give him half-a-crown for a two-shilling-bit. Sunny Jim, they call him over there."

"I suppose I must see him. You'd better show him down here."

Sir Caleb was, of course, immensely cordial.

"I've been wanting to make your acquaintance for such a long time, Mr. Deverell. But I've always been a little bit frightened of your landing here. It'll be terrible in Winter, won't it? I don't see how you'll ever manage to live here."

"Oh, I think it'll be all right," Dick said.

"I hope so for your sake," Sir Caleb said with grave commiseration. "But I've been quite worried about it. As soon as they

told me in Penzawn that you'd taken Carrackoon, though I'd never had the pleasure of meeting you, I felt quite upset. I asked several people whatever you would do in winter time, and they all seemed quite upset, too."

"I know something about Carrackoon in Winter," Dick said cheerfully. "I was on Roon, you must remember, all the Winter before last."

"Yes, I know. But Roon is very different to this. In fact I don't think the Palatinate people ought to let it for anybody to live on. But that's the worst of government officials. They don't care what they do provided they can get their money. And I am afraid that you've been rather swindled over the rent. You're paying much too much. Perhaps you have already begun to regret your tenancy?"

"Not at all. I love the place."

"Well, of course, I don't know your tastes," said Sir Caleb, looking at the façade of the ruined Georgian house with an expression of disgust. "But I think it's a horrible place. I'm afraid you'll get very depressed here. And I'm afraid you'll have the greatest difficulty in getting it off your hands. I don't know who would take it from you, I'm sure."

"I don't know either," said Dick. "And I'm afraid I never shall know, because I'll be dead before the next tenant comes along. My tenancy is for life."

"Yes, I heard that, and I've been feeling so worried about you."

"You really need not bother to fret over me," Dick said irritably. If there was much increase in the exudation of Sir Caleb's pity, he should have some difficulty in restraining himself from catching him a clump over the head with his spade.

"So I came over this afternoon to find out if perhaps it might not be rather a relief for you to sub-let Carrackoon or, perhaps, transfer the lease to me."

"To you?" Dick exclaimed. "But I thought you disliked the island?"

"I do. I dislike it intensely," Sir Caleb affirmed. "I don't think I've ever disliked any place so much except Naples. But it happens to suit a little experiment I'm anxious to try, and so I'm prepared to make you an offer for your lease."

"I don't want to sell."

"I would go to £25," Sir Caleb squeezed out of himself, his eyes as wide open at his own recklessness as if he were a child walking successfully without support for the first time.

"I don't want to sell."

"I might manage to go to £50," he groaned painfully. And one was left with the impression that if he did go to £50 his life would be endangered.

"You can go to £500, Sir Caleb," said Dick. "You can go to £5,000 if you like. But nothing would induce me to sell my lease. And let me add that I would rather sell Carrackoon to anybody before I sold it to you. I don't think we need prolong this conversation. Grimmer! Grimmer!" He shouted more loudly, "Grimmer! Oh, there you are! Grimmer, show Sir Caleb Fuller the way down to the beach," and turning his back, Dick dug his spade into the ground as if he were digging a grave for his visitor.

"There was one more little thing I wanted to ask you, Mr. Deverell."

"Confound you," Dick cried in exasperation. "I'm not going to sell you the lease of Carrackoon. Can't you take 'no' for an answer?"

"Please don't lose your temper, Mr. Deverell. Nothing is ever gained by losing one's temper. I've given you no cause to treat me in this fashion. I was actuated solely by consideration for you when I made you this offer. I'm a little sorry I wasted so much sympathy on you. But it *did* worry me to think of you stranded on this horrid little island, and I wanted to help you if I could. When you're as old as me and have had to struggle as I have to earn a living you'll understand my feelings better. But I'm not angry; I'm only just a little bit hurt that a man young enough to be my son should speak to me like this. However, I don't want to bear any grudge against you, and as I came up the path I noticed you had some poultry. I don't know if you've ever tried feeding fowls on Quaker Oats? But I happen to have three or four cases of Quaker Oats that were a little damaged by sea-water. They're over at Roon now with the rest of the stores from my yacht. And if you like to send your man over with me now, I'll *give* you those Quaker Oats for your fowls."

"Haven't you been able to get rid of them yet?" said Dick rudely. "Look here, Sir Caleb Fuller, I've no wish to know you. I don't like you. I never shall like you. And I don't ever want to see you on this island again. Please get off it."

Grimmer stepped forward and touched the undaunted philanthropist on the shoulder.

"Come along, sir, Mr. Deverell's a bit busy to-day."

Sir Caleb stalked down to the beach in silence, where he waved angrily with his alpenstock for Boy Alec to take him off in the dinghy.

"Sir Caleb Full Up," Grimmer murmured to himself sardonically, as the magnate sat down with a bump in the stern. "All right, Casabianca," he shouted as Boy Alec found the boat hard to push. "I'll give you a starter. How's yourself?"

"I'm feeling handsome, Mr. Grimmer."

"That's right. Off she goes. We don't want no wreck of the *Esperus* here. Oxford upstairs eating all the cakes, Cambridge downstairs licking up the plates. And mind you don't run over one of our pet kippers on the way back."

Boy Alec was so exquisitely tickled by the humour of this remark that he caught a crab, which splashed Sir Caleb from head to foot.

"Mind out, young Harvey; the genelman may look as if he expected to get a bit wet, but he forgot his umberella when he remembered the clothes-prop."

That evening Sir Caleb told the Knight that he had been right indeed in his dislike of Deverell.

"One of the most objectionable young men I ever met," he declared bitterly. "And really, though I don't quite like to say such a thing about anybody, but still really I'm afraid he's rather a bounder."

32

ASKING FOR MORE

If the Summer on Roan had been a purgatory, that Winter was worse. Every cottage was crowded with workmen who were transforming the "barracks" into tea-rooms, erecting the lamp-posts that were to glow with the bleak flame of the petrol-gas which as a minor mercy Sir Caleb had decided would be more economical for Roan than coal-gas, hacking up the towans to make them golf-able, and generally tidying up the island to suit suburban ideals. He was away himself for most of November and all December; but his son came down to stay for a fortnight, and Sir Morgan in his desire to disparage Dick Deverell went out of his way not merely to be most cordial himself to the young man, but to insist on the

pleasure his company must be affording his two daughters. Venetia had no scruples about insulting him; but Vivien, in her anxiety not to give her father the least excuse to reproach her, was always trying to make up for Venetia's rudeness, with the result that her father began to suppose she had taken a genuine fancy to young Fuller. Such was his prejudice against Dick, he even went so far as to hint this to his guest, who might have proposed for Vivien's hand cocksurely enough, had not Venetia insulted him so successfully that he took himself off with ruffled plumes to meditate at a distance on an alliance which might involve him in being hen-pecked by a sister-in-law. The open quarrel arose over Dick, when one day young Fuller and the girls walking over Rosevean saw him in the clear air of a heavy November morning at work on the paths round his island.

"Which reminds me," said Norman Fuller. "I've been meaning to go over there and give that fellow a lesson."

"A lesson in what?" Venetia inquired.

"In manners."

"In manners?" she ejaculated. "Don't try to be funny."

"I'm not trying to be funny. He was very rude to my father when he was down here, and that won't go down with me."

"Why, what would *you* do?" Venetia asked contemptuously.

"Give him a good thrashing," said young Fuller, loosening his collar with a swaggering gesture.

Venetia laughed uncontrollably.

"What are you laughing at?" he demanded angrily.

"You, of course. You see, I'm afraid I think you're funny whether you're trying to be or not. Why, Dick Deverell could put you across his knee and smack you, and he probably would, my poor lad. It's no good your talking like that to us. Dick Deverell didn't dress up in a naval uniform to sweep up sardine-tins during the war. He fought, strange as it may seem to you. My gosh, you make me feel sick. The only thing you'd ever be able to thrash might be a puppy, and you wouldn't do that if I was anywhere about. If I didn't think your parent would come moaning down here, I'd tell Dick Deverell what you said, and row him over myself to give *you* a jolly good licking . . ."

"Venetia, don't," Vivien interposed.

"Oh, shut up! I'm not going to keep quiet while people make fools of themselves. I know quite well that our gallant young guest has no more intention of going over to Carrackoon than he had of

going to France. But if he thinks he's going to come it over me with his gas, he's mistaken. Pooh! Bah! When gas begins to stink, it's time to turn it off. Sorry to be so rude, Norman, but you asked for it."

The young man glowered sulkily for the rest of the walk, and the next day he found that he had promised to stay with some friends in Kent.

When Vivien expostulated with her, Venetia was firm.

"Oh, no, on the contrary, silent contempt is perfectly useless with people like the Fullers. And I'm tired of this argument about darling Father. He may have taken you into his confidence, but he's left me guessing. Just as well, perhaps, because there's one person anyway on Roon who can still speak her mind. I say, let Roon go to hell, if we've got to put up with the Fullers. Look at my birthday! Ruined just because nobody had the pluck to speak out. I'm sick of the whole lot of you, and if I didn't think it would do more harm than good I'd row across to Carrackoon to-morrow and ask Dick to employ me as a land-girl. If that idiot Dick hadn't funk'd saying that you loved him, everything could have been settled by now."

This stung Vivien into saying that were it not for Venetia she would have eloped with him by now.

"Oh, Vivien, how mean of you to say a thing like that! Don't you dare try and do a Caleb on me. If you had the guts of a cricket, you'd have hopped away long ago. Well, I give you fair warning. I'll put up with being a lost cause till next Spring, but after that if you and Dick don't grapple with Father, well, then I give you both up."

The nearness of her love, instead of filling Vivien with courage, made her more timid. She had really been happier when Dick was working hard at his new profession in Guernsey. There had never been any difficulty about correspondence, thanks to the ease with which the mailbag could always be intercepted before it reached Romare's House. But now when instead of getting letters she was meeting him secretly in the cave at the end of the adit, every tryst was a terror lest her father should discover what was going on. Added to that there was the anxiety over his rowing across in bad weather, and before a month of this detestable winter had gone by Vivien was so much overstrained that she was no longer capable of responding to her lover's perpetual hopefulness. For her the future seemed to hold nothing except difficulties that would

gradually heap themselves one upon the other until a mountain was raised between them impassable for evermore. Dick divined presently that the meetings by the cave were putting too great a tax upon her endurance. He had a hard struggle to deny himself the joy of holding her in his arms, even though her eyes were turned from him in dread of shadows, and though her ears instead of listening to his vows were for ever strained to catch the sound of a hostile footstep. But he did succeed at last in conquering any selfish delight in thus having her to himself once or twice a week on this small beach between the dark heart of earth and the turbid wintry sea.

"Vivien, darling, I'm going to make a suggestion about the immediate future."

Her wild eyes turned away from the dripping cave behind them to meet his own in alarm.

"Not more often, not more often, Dick?"

He shook his head.

"I was going to suggest that we should not meet again until the Spring. When April is here—mid-April if you like—we'll meet again, and you shall tell me if you think the time has come to ask your father to give you to me. I'll be braver next time, and not tell any more foolish lies."

"Oh, Dick, you'll think me a great coward, but it would be better. There's a curse on Roon now, and not even our love will escape it if we're not careful. Darling of my heart, I'm a wretched coward, and I don't deserve that you should love me. Perhaps you won't soon."

He took her in his arms.

"My treasure, I think promises are not worth much, because they are too easy to make. I shall always love you. I can't say more. So try to drive *that* ugly phantom away. At least let me know that you believe in my love. If we never meet, and I think because we never meet that you're saying to yourself 'he loves me no more,' why, that might be more than I could bear."

"Ah, I know you love me. I know you do. And it was wicked of me to say what I did. Forgive my cowardice and my weakness."

The waves broke with a louder beat against the rocks that guarded this hidden beach—the colour of honeysuckle.

"Dick, don't wait any longer. Don't wait, my dearest! You won't get back against the tide with the wind in the east. You oughtn't to have come to-day. Oh, Dick, you will take such risks!"

Another wave broke against a bastion of rock, and a few drops of spray sprinkled them. Vivien seemed distraught. All the foreboding and sorrow in her heart found an expression in her fear for Dick's safety.

"Go now," she cried. "Go now before the sea gets worse."

He saw that every moment he lingered would increase her agitation. Hard though it was, he kissed her a long good-bye until April, and hurried down to where his boat was lurching in the tide. There was not much difficulty in getting off the beach, which was protected by the horns of rock that almost enclosed it. But the flood running with the wind made the task of crossing the strait a hard one, and in the end he had to give up the usual beach and pull round southward toward Mab, where he could gain the shelter of Carrackoon and land. Vivien watched from the top of Rosevean his stiff course, and her anxiety reflected the state of her mind. She and Venetia had frequently been out in weather a great deal worse than this afternoon's, and thoroughly enjoyed the exhilaration of the strong pulling it demanded. Yet now she stood on the cliff's edge, quaking for Dick's safety. As soon as he rounded the Lion rock she turned back across the island, thankful that he had of his own accord proposed what her cowardice had been craving for.

"A curse on Roon," she sighed, as the east wind whipped across the neglected fields and drove a dozen starved plovers to the kindlier slopes of the western cliffs.

Beyond the pine-wood she met old Holt looking as grey and shrivelled and half-transparent as the slough of a blind worm twitching by the roadside in the sere blast.

"Bitter weather, miss," he said, dabbing at his forelock.

"Horrible."

"And there's more of it coming," he went on. "I never saw so many plover before in December month." He looked sadly across Nanjizel Top, on which the moss lay sour. "I suppose there's no news of anything being done to the land? It makes I mad to look at the way the fields be all left go to ruination. 'Tis no more than blessed folly to set six men cutting up good pasture for a beggaring game that none but poor idle fools would play. Be you going to play at this here golf, miss?"

"Not I, Holt."

"Of course not. 'Tis no game at all by what I can make of it. There was Jervis and Tom Bell out trying to show I how 'twere

done. Pooh! Bah! Pooh! Bah! A couple of ninnies, that's what they looked like. Now a good game of cricket anybody can enjoy. I don't know what's coming to poor old Roon. And this Sir Calip Fuller. My goodness. I never knew such a stupid man in all my life. He met I last time he were down when I were leading Queen of the May. 'Are you taking that nice cow out for a little walk, Holt?' he says to I. 'My goodness, no,' I says to him. 'I be leading her to the bull, sir.' And wi' that he turned so red as a poppy, and 'Oh dear,' he says, 'I beg your pardon, Holt.' Now what's a sensible man to make of a fellow like that? Well, I mustn't keep you standing gossiping here in the cold, miss. I've been a bit worried about my wife these last two days. She've caught a bit of a cold, and it have gone to her chest. I were going to ask Sir Morgan if I could have the doctor over to take a look at her; but law! he do always show so frail and hurried himself these days I didn't hardly like to bother him."

"Of course, the doctor must come over at once," Vivien declared. "I'll see about it myself."

"Thank you, miss. I don't suppose 'tis anything. But I've been a bit anxious, because she haven't spoke sharp to I for a couple of days, and that's a bit unnatural for she."

Three days after this old Mrs. Holt died, and on a still morning of frost the coffin glided over a sea of ink to Penzawn.

"'Twon't be long afore I jines her," the old man sobbed.

The two girls petted him like a little child.

"Not yet," they begged. "Not yet, Holt."

"Why, I don't believe Sir Morgan will need I much longer," he sobbed. "'Twon't be long afore he says to I, 'Holt, Sir Calip Fuller don't want no more done to the land nowhere.' And that'll finish I off proper. Because I bean't going to stand on the pier and take no begging tickets from these monkey-faced trippers," he declared passionately. "And which is what Sir Calip Fuller axed me if I wouldn't like to do this Summer. Od rat it, I'd liefer walk my way home along till I seed Salisbury spire again, and died in my own country."

"But we want you, Holt," they cried. "Roon wouldn't be Roon without you. You won't leave us. You couldn't."

The old man's spirits were raised soon after Christmas—a melancholy Christmas indeed—by the defeat of the tank. With the aid of the new crane the monstrous engine was disembarked. Willett, the engineer that Sir Caleb had forced on the Knight,

hopped round it like a small boy who is going to be taken for a ride on the Zoo elephant.

"Now then, Mr. Holt, jump up, and I'll run you down to the beach," he chirped perkily.

"I'm begged if you will, then," the old man declared wrathfully.

Three or four of the workmen volunteered to drive over the towans in the great machine.

"That's right," said Willett. "Jump up, boys. Now then, Mr. Holt, how much sea-weed do you want?"

"More than you'll ever bring up in that great stinking bag of old iron," said Holt contemptuously.

The tank set out along the lower road toward the towans, groaning, clattering, grinding, thundering. At a decent interval Holt followed with Ernie Pascoe, Sam Hockin and the girls. When they reached the gate they found that the tank had obliterated in its course gate and posts and a good slice of the hedge on either side.

"Od rat that Cockney reskil," the old man swore. "I'm danged if he be fit to carry a flag in front of a steam-roller."

They could see the tank plunging on across the towans toward the last line of dunes, where it waited for the spectators to come and admire the final proof of its prowess.

"I suppose you want her taken right down to the sea-weed?" Willett asked proudly.

"If you can," said Holt. "The old horses never jibbed wi' the wagon."

Willett performed some ear-shattering operation with the gears. The tank galumphed forward, mounted the sandy slope, and vanished over the other side. But when it was half-way across the beach to the sea it stuck in the moist sand; and nothing that Willett could say, no noise that he could make, no handle that he could pull, would induce it to move an inch backward or forward.

"We seem to be stuck for the moment," he said in a crestfallen voice.

"Stuck for the moment?" Holt echoed. "Stuck till the Day of Judgment you be."

And at twilight there was little of the tank visible above the dark winter sea. There would it lie and rust, a hideous monument of the iron age on Roon.

Sir Caleb arrived a week or two after this and was very angry indeed when he heard what had happened to his pet. He tried to hope that the trippers would find it an additional attraction, but he

evidently had his doubts. Perhaps it was to compensate himself for the failure of the tank that he approached the Knight with a new scheme.

"I don't want you to misunderstand the little suggestion I'm going to make, Romare," he began with a smile.

The Knight braced himself to hear the worst. Sir Caleb's anxiety not to be misunderstood was always the prelude of some abominable breach of taste whether in word or deed.

"It's about the Chapel," he went on.

"What about the Chapel?"

"Well, I've been thinking very seriously about the Chapel, and I've been wondering if you couldn't see your way to turn it into an ordinary little church during the season."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Please don't misunderstand what I'm going to say, Romare. What I feel is that if visitors could come over here for a quiet Sunday they would appreciate a nice homely little service, and they couldn't quite have that in a Roman Catholic Chapel, could they?"

"Are you suggesting that I should turn my Chapel into a Protestant meeting-house?" Sir Morgan asked.

"Oh no, oh no! Nothing like that! I don't think the class of visitor we hope to get here would care at all for a meeting-house. What I would suggest is the ordinary service that people are accustomed to. And I think it would be so much better for all your work-people. Educated men like you and me don't require religion in the same way that work-people do. It's really good for them, and I would always try and give it to them when I could. And I can't help feeling that a nice simple little service would be a great attraction to Roon. I daresay one of the curates in Penzawn would come over if you could give him lunch. And then you or I could read the lessons. I would be quite willing to present a beautiful large brass alms-dish which I picked up the other day, and an organ I bought from the bankrupt stock of a cinema theatre which cost me eighteen pounds. But, of course, there are one or two rather peculiar images and pictures which I think we ought to remove for the summer season, because they might frighten the class of visitor we want to encourage here. Please don't think that I'm suggesting taking down any of the memorials of your family. Indeed they would be quite an attraction, and on week-days we might make a little charge to view them. Old Holt could be put into a cassock

and show visitors round. That would give him something to do when he's not taking tickets on the pier."

The Knight corrected as tolerantly as he could Sir Caleb's ideas on the purpose of chapels; but Sir Caleb himself was extremely injured by his friend's refusal to see his little experiment in the right light. One of the adjuncts to greed is shamelessness; although Sir Caleb was in a perpetual itch of prurient modesty and liable to break out in a rash of blushes over the simplest incident of farm-life, he did not know the meaning of shame. His capacity for asking and the way he would whine if he was refused was almost physically unpleasant. The Knight gave way to him on many occasions merely because the very sight of those pouting middle-aged lips and sulky eyes embarrassed him. He was sometimes afraid that the fellow would possibly blubber when he objected to one of his improvements; and there were moments when the fire-work magnate appeared to him like a pot-bellied brat in pantaloons and jerkin such as Cruickshank drew, like a nightmare composite of the Fat Boy and Jack Horner. There were moments when his reality as Sir Caleb Fuller was incredible, and when the position he himself occupied in regard to him had the monstrous improbability of a dream.

In February the Knight wrote a letter to Sir Caleb, expressing his earnest hope that when April came he would see his way to take up the option forthwith. By this time he was beginning to wonder if he should be able to meet even the first instalment of the loan he had to repay. He was paying out large sums every week for the incidental expenses that the maintenance of twenty extra workmen cost him; and, even if he could satisfy his chief creditor, how he was going to find the money to keep Roon going during the Summer he did not know.

The Knight's letter brought Sir Caleb down to Roon. But he could offer no hope of being able to take up the option in April. The yacht was still unsold. Miss Upcott's journey to Australia in search of funds had so far been unsuccessful. The house-agents offered him no hope of being able to get rid of Bilkton Towers in a hurry, even if he were prepared to make a great sacrifice.

"The only thing I could do to help you, Romare, would be to take the Old Inn."

"How would that help me?"

"Why, I thought I would like to do it up and turn it into a house for myself. I would be willing to pay you £100 a year for it if you

would give me twenty-one years' lease. And all my things from the yacht are stored there as you know."

The Knight knew that very well. Tom Bell had shown him the long list, which included everything from bottles of Tabasco sauce to what for niceness its owner called a bread-pan containing one flat-iron, two rolls of toilet-paper, and three scrubbing-brushes.

"But that wouldn't help me," the Knight expostulated. "And what about the trippers?"

"They'd have the new tea-rooms, which by the way aren't going ahead as quickly as I would like to see them going. I hope you won't think me interfering if I take this opportunity to speak seriously to the contractor about hurrying on with the work. I daresay you could squeeze in a few more work-people. You could quite easily if you would only get rid of some of what I hope you won't misunderstand me when I call them useless old hands."

The Knight could not bring himself to give a flat refusal on the spot to Sir Caleb's proposal about the Inn. He dreaded too much to see that disgusting expression of thwarted greed.

"Well, I'll have to let you know about this new suggestion of yours, Fuller," he temporised.

"Thank you very much," Sir Caleb breathed humbly, as if between him and destitution there was only the Knight's consent to let him occupy the Old Inn.

Sir Caleb went back to Cheshire. The Knight shut himself up in his library, trying to work out a system for the maintenance of Roon through next Summer, which with every week that passed appeared less and less practicable.

"If I could only have got away to Monte Carlo for a month, I'd have put everything straight," he kept telling himself. "And if that fellow hadn't gone and planted himself on Carrackoon I could have gone."

33

THE PICTURE

Dick Deverell had too much faith in the marriage of Vivien and himself next June to repine at the wasted hours of Winter or imperil the future by exchanging vows in the present. That he would

always be serenely free from romantic temptation until April he never pretended to himself. He knew that there would be many hours tantalized by the thought of Vivien's nearness. He knew that his eyes would be often turned toward the cliffs of Roon, straining to catch a glimpse of her. Still, for a young man as deep in love as he was Dick did stick to his work, and thus he discovered by experience the truth of one more platitude. He never had the least doubt that he and his love had been wise in deciding not to meet. That lie he told her father must never be repeated. He was under no delusion about the difficulties before them in the Spring; but dragons were most vulnerable where they looked most dangerous. Even when Venetia suggested coming over from time to time he forbade her.

Your support, dearest little girl, will be twice as useful if your father cannot accuse you of acting as a go-between this winter, he wrote firmly.

"I'm not turning into a prig, am I?" he asked himself when he read this sentence through. "Well, if I am," he decided, "it's better to be a practical prig than an impractical lover."

Dick, no more aware than the girls of the precise relation in which Sir Caleb Fuller stood to the Knight, insisted that if their father allowed him to become the owner of half Roon, Vivien was entitled to refuse to countenance the partition. She and Venetia were co-heiresses, and as such they had a right to challenge their father's disposal of their future. He did not forget Vivien's apprehensions about Venetia's position, should she assert herself and marry a man of whom her father disapproved; but he argued that Venetia getting on for sixteen would be too much of a personality for even the Knight to quell.

The Trinculos and Stephanos of the garrison and these Fuller people may between them have roused Caliban. But I won't believe that Roon will allow itself to be exploited when it comes to the point, he wrote to Vivien. *I know that something will happen to put everything right. And I know that we are going to be married in June. Meanwhile, I'm getting Carrackoon ready for you just as if the wedding presents were coming in by every post. I know that my task is a thousand times easier than yours. But please don't think I'm working merely to distract myself. I'm working because I know that if we are to be married I must work. And we are to be married in June. I know that just as I know the sun will rise to-morrow. I'm not going to tell you everything I'm doing. This*

all sounds like a brutal heartiness, but I'm not bolstering up my courage. You shine through everything I do and think and feel and am. Have faith, my adored Vivien, that we are near the end of our waiting.

Dick grew very close to the heart of his island through these months of his novitiate. He did not experience the elation of feeling monarch of all he surveyed that vulgar opinion ascribes to the dweller on a small island. On the contrary he apprehended more truly every day how little the island belonged to him, how much he belonged to it. The Englishman who had planted those bulbs of the hoop-petticoat daffodil, Sir Morolt Romare who had planted those groves of trees, the monks who had dragged those granite boulders up the steep slopes to portion out the fields, even his immediate predecessor the German who had pursued here his studies of marine biology—each of these could claim a greater importance to Carrackoon than himself. He might venture to think that he loved it as dearly as any of them; but only with the aid of time could he hope that his spirit would be enshrined here like theirs, so that a century hence some young man of the future coming to the island should think of him as he was thinking now of those who had walked round this microcosm of a world before him, and should bless him perhaps for the shade of trees.

And what was all the history of humanity's place on Carrackoon compared with the countless years that unrolled themselves behind each wren that slipped along the bank before his approaching footsteps? Generation upon generation of wrens had dwelt here. The fancy of their myriad wings darkened the sky and cast a shadow on the sea. Their pedigree went back perhaps to the fluttering pair that were cut off on this high land when the sea rose and drowned so many miles of Lyonesse. All the other birds of Carrackoon must bob to the wrens, for all the other birds were settlers here. But these little troglodytes were as old as the island itself. So long had they dwelt here that they had even learnt to fear no more the noise of the waves. The cocks would sometimes build their nests in the samphire scarcely a yard above the tide's ultimate advance, and there roost unperturbed. There was room for many wrens on Carrackoon, so small were they, and no bumpkins had ever harried them here. In February when the elm-buds were red as wine one heard their elfin rattles again, and anywhere on the island the wrens would soon come close enough for the observer to count the sober dicing of their wings and perceive their busy eyes in glittering con-

templation of the minute insects they hunted. On the other hand there were only two pairs of robins. The island would not hold more. Every Summer the speckled young ones would be chased off, and if by chance a bitter wind should blow a strange robin on these shores, the two pairs who perhaps more than anything else put forward a definite claim to the ownership of the island pursued him out to sea with shrill threats. Yet there were three pairs of sea-pies who claimed proprietary rights of nesting on the rocks of Carrackoon. They were glad to meet other sea-pies in Winter and gossip with them for hours together, but the six who owned the island always impressed on the visitors that they were only visitors by coming home to roost at dusk and not inviting the others to stay. The chief dread in the life of the sea-pies was that the ravens of Roon should leave the larger island and settle here. At the first croak overhead the sea-pies would mount screaming above them, launching savage thrusts with their long red beaks until the ravens were put to confused flight.

"This is the parish pump with a vengeance," Dick thought, "when I find one of my chief interests in life to be a squabble between ravens and oyster-catchers. Sydney Colvin grumbled at Stevenson for supposing that in London he could possibly be interested in the squabbles of Samoan factions. And Stevenson was much offended, and so should I be if anybody failed to perceive what a momentous question this is. Why *should* these ravens suppose that they have the right of landing here? And in eternity as between sea-pies and ravens, or as between Germans and French, is there so much difference in the importance of the struggle?"

Dick managed to persuade a carpenter and his young brother to take up their residence after Christmas, and with help from Grimmer and himself to put the house in order for his bride. The pitchpine was canvassed over and covered with an ivory white paper. Various cupboards were built; the water supply was put in order; the cottage was done up; and by the end of March half the furniture was in its place, for nearly every Monday the *Melusine* had taken Grimmer and Dick over to Penzawn whence they made various expeditions to other towns in the Palatinate, usually returning on Tuesday afternoon with some trophy from a sale or a second-hand furniture shop. Once or twice they were weather-bound in Penzawn; but mostly they were favoured by the sea as if the island desired their quick return. Dick would often try to find

words to express the magic of those homecomings when the *Melusine* rounded the rocky promontory of Merg and glided over the jade-green water that covered the sand as far as the shelving grey beach. But the sensation remained indescribable. It was indeed magic. He might watch with indifference, even with boredom, the island ahead of them all the way across from Lyonnaise; but every time he drew near again the completeness of its personality overwhelmed him, so that every time he landed under a spell. The auburn of October darkened through chestnut and squirrel to the russet of November. The russet turned to a puce-brown in mid-winter, and thence to fallow until by February the slopes were washed with green again. By the second week in April this young verdure was creaming over with primroses and sea-pinks crayonned the warm granite of the southern cliffs, until gradually, deeper each day, the island was drowned in hyacinthine floods of bluebells that seemed to overflow and with their fragrance perfuse the very sea itself. And all these various scents and hues make Dick ask himself if the island had been raised by enchantment from the floor of the ocean or woven out of the air by airy spirits.

"You are lovely as a mirage," he apostrophized on a golden-eyed evening of early Spring, "but oh, thank heaven, you are as real as an apple."

When they were doing up the house Dick was concerned about the portrait left behind by his predecessor, and at last through Penfold he managed to find out where the German conchologist was. In answer to his letter offering to send him the picture, he received the following reply from Naples:

Dear Sir!

I was much obliged indeed for your kind letter which was expedited to me here where I study in the aquarium. You are right to think how it was a picture I was esteeming and I was very grateful for your kindness to say you would wish to send it to me and I with pleasure accept your intention with much thanks. It was my father who is dead for two years now.

*I was happy indeed on beautiful Carrackoon and am sad for this war which has destroyed so much. I will think of you often and I hope you will find much pleasure in your life. It would do me a large favour if you could find for me *Chaetopterus Variopedatus* which was being called *C. Pergamatensis*. He may be found in very low tides on the sandbank to the East of little Merg. I was*

being always very much interested in marine worms. He will break very easy and you will please take care of him. He may be put in spirits and he will make the colour of them blue and green with his fluorescence.

If you are acquaint with the Misses Romare of Roon I wish you to make them all my compliments. I found much kindness from them while I am on Carrackoon. I hear the young Mr. Romare is dead in the war, and for that I wish you do not intrude my name if it is not welcome.

With all my obliged thanks for the picture and the worm,

Yours sincere

Heinrich Gutenberg.

Winter passed by with kindly swiftmess. It seemed but a moment since the waves were roaring in an endless monotone all round the island; and now wherever he stood Dick heard different noises—the plucking of harps and the tapping of dulcimers, the echoes of remote bands, faint quirings and the far-off bark of dogs, long susurrations, whispers, sighs, and most mysterious of all at one particular spot on the slopes above Mab the murmur of an earnest conversation so like a real conversation that every moment he expected to surprise a mermaid's secret. It seemed but a moment since on a December dawn he had looked out from a dark room boarded round with pitchpine and watched the yellow horns of a shrunken moon go riding through the frore mist above the tree-tops beyond the garden; and now in this March dusk the room was white, a thrush was singing in the mulberry, and primroses were glimmering in the light of a young moon. All through the Spring, Dick thought, he should bring furniture for this white empty room, and at last in June he should bring her. After Easter he would go to Roon and ask the Knight more boldly this time for his daughter. Even Easter was early in this propitious year.

While Dick on Carrackoon was exulting in the flight of time, on Roon the Knight was sitting at his cherry-wood table and pondering with the gloomiest apprehensions this rapid advance of Spring. No amount of adding up the wage list, no amount of ruthless dismissals on paper offered the least prospect of being able to carry on through the months of May and June when trippers would still be too scarce to help. Fuller would take the opportunity to urge once more the necessity of getting rid of people like Holt and Hockin. It would mean another overdraft. Perhaps the bank might refuse

him further accommodation. The directors might consider that in financing him they were financing Caleb Fuller, which they might reasonably object to doing. But even if he could obtain an overdraft to see him through the Summer there was another instalment to be paid in October. It was clear that Fuller did not intend to take up his option this Spring, and he certainly would not take it up next Autumn because there would be no money coming in before the following Summer. In fact it was merely stupid to be optimistic any longer. The earliest date at which Fuller was likely to come in over Roon was July year. Moreover, since he had refused him the tenancy of the Old Inn his creditor's tone had changed to one of resentment and suspicion. Yet it would have been suicidal to accept his offer. With a twenty-one years' lease of the Old Inn he would have been less likely than ever to take up the option within a reasonable time. What swines these men of business were! "No more dealing for me with uncircumcised theosophists, who's lechery is gold," the Knight ejaculated. And then with the melancholy thought that presently he would not be in a position to deal with anybody, he returned to the task of trying to conjure from the figures on the paper some inspiration for tackling the future. He had better for his peace of mind have let them alone, because on reviewing the situation once more he discovered that he had forgotten to add the interest on the loan to the instalment. Another £300. He simply should not have a shilling left. His eyes turned toward the wall of the turret leading up to the ambulatory, and particularly to one stone round which the mortar showed fresh beside the others.

"It's all that's left," he muttered. Then he rose from the table and paced up and down the shadowy room in much agitation. At last he rang the bell.

"Send down the hill for Hockin to come up and see me at once," he told Siddle.

While he was waiting for the mason the Knight's agitation grew more acute. As if the floor was too much encumbered for him he ascended the turret stairs and strode with heavy steps backward and forward along the ambulatory where sometime in shadow sometime in lamplight his lean form appeared like one of Doré's Don Quixotes in the toils of phantasy.

Sam Hockin nearly jumped out of his skin when he entered the library and heard the Knight's voice call harshly down to him:

"Have you brought your tools with you?"

"No, Sir Morgan. I didn't understand from the message you wanted me to bring them up along."

"Why the deuce should I send for you at this hour unless I wanted you to bring your tools?" the Knight demanded.

Sam Hockin scratched his head in bewilderment; he had never hitherto particularly connected half-past six with a job of work.

"You remember that box you walled up for me in the Spring before my boy went to France? I want it taken out."

"Very good, Sir Morgan, I'll go back along to once and fetch my tools."

"No!" the Knight shouted. "Do it to-morrow morning. Do it first thing, and bring the box up to my bedroom."

The mason retired, and the Knight went back to his wandering until it was time to dress for dinner.

His daughters expected nowadays to find him gloomy and pre-occupied at every meal; but to-night he called for champagne, of which he drank many glasses and invited them to drink too. He talked excitably all the time, and he was strangely affectionate. It reminded them of the evening before Murdo went away for the last time, and of the way their father kept hugging him. After dinner when the two girls were going to bid him good night and retire to the tower to discuss his extraordinary behaviour, the Knight insisted on their coming to sit with him in the library where nothing would please him but that Holt should be fetched in to have a glass of brandy.

"The poor old boy's been moping since his wife died," said the Knight. "I ought to have had him in to chat to me of an evening. But I've been so dull lately."

Vivien and Venetia stared at one another, asking with raised eyebrows what this new attitude portended.

"Ah, Holt, there you are! Good! Come along and sit down. Here's a glass of brandy for you. Drink it down, man, drink it down. Don't stand there bobbing at it like a sparrow at a puddle."

"My goodness, I won't," said the old man twinkling. And he drained the glass. "My goodness," he said, wiping his lips. "That's pretty stuff, that is. I'm bothered if it isn't."

"Have another. Come along, come along," the Knight urged.

"No, no, Sir Morgan. Odds, you'll have I tipsy."

"Nonsense, nonsense, you can sit down and sip the next one."

The old man looked round at the girls.

"My goodness, I didn't know we was going to have a bit of fun to-night," he chuckled.

"Too much Lent's good for nobody," said the Knight, laughing loudly at his own joke of which nobody except himself could understand the point.

Holt, after dabbing his forehead in apology to the Knight and his daughters, seated himself on one of the tall box-chairs with his legs dangling like the old Punchinello he resembled.

"I'm bothered if you bean't looking twenty years younger to-night, Sir Morgan," he declared.

But the girls were thinking as they watched their father that he was looking older than they had ever seen him; for to them his laughter and gesticulations and bright excited eyes but served to enhance his thinness, and the crimson spot on each jutting cheekbone only made the dead skin of age more noticeable.

"Well, we shall have Sir Caleb Fuller back here after Easter, Holt," said the Knight boisterously.

"A-look now, we shall?" said Holt.

"You'll be glad to see him, eh?"

The old man glanced at everybody in turn.

"Not too glad," he said at last, taking an extra large sip at his brandy to strengthen his capacity for criticism. "Not *too* glad I shan't be," he repeated silyly. "He's a bit too much of a smiler for I. Whenever I see a man smile like that I be always afeard of his bite. And I reckon Sir Calip could gi' anybody a nasty bite if he were in the mind."

"You're about right there, Holt," said the Knight.

"I'm sure I be right, Sir Morgan. Law! Wouldn't Sir Morven have hated 'un?"

"No, I don't think m'father would have cared for him."

"My goodness, I'm sartin he wouldn't. Why, I remember when I first come to Roon, there was a fellow landed from Penzawn and come smiling up to Sir Morven on the pier. 'Good morning,' he says. 'Good morning,' says Sir Morven. 'Can you kindly tell me,' he says, 'where's the best place for fish on this island?' 'In the water,' says Sir Morven, and wi' that he lifts up his leg and kicks 'un over the quay into the harbour. 'And, Holt,' he says, turning to me, 'when that grinning jackynapes comes ashore and axes you where's a better place for fish on my island, boot 'un over t'other side of the quay,' he says."

"And did he ask you?" said Venetia.

"No, he climbed into his boat and went back along to Penzawn wi'out another word. Odds! I don't believe tha man ever lived who'd spake twice to Sir Morven. But he were never angry wi' me but once."

"When was that?" Vivien asked, who knew the answer well, but was anxious to keep Holt talking rather than give her father the chance to sneer at the Cheshire Cat, which in the circumstances she felt was petty somehow for him.

"Why, it were when I come upon him once in the drive planting back a lot of rubbishy weeds he'd found dug up and laid in a heap against the bank by one of the gardeners. 'Law, Sir Morven,' I says, 'whatever be the use of planting they old weeds in the drive?' 'You damned fool, Holt,' he shouted." And in order to convey the impression of Sir Morven's voice raised in anger, Holt employed a very high falsetto. "'You damned fool, hold your foolish tongue. They'll make a beautiful carpet for my feet, I tell 'ee.' My goodness, I walked on a bit sharp, but that were the only time he spoke a bit rough to I. And he were a very wise man, Sir Morven were. I remember when he took on a new dairy-maid from a farm near Penzawn he come to me and says, 'Holt, I've brought back a wife for 'ee.' And I'm bothered if he weren't right." The old man mopped his eye and took another sip of brandy. "But she be gone back along to Penzawn now," he said. "And I'll be crossing soon myself, I reckon."

"Now, Holt," said the Knight. "None of that! Why, you'll be mimicking me when I've been ten years in the grave just as you're mimicking m'father to-night."

"I'm bothered if I didn't forget for a minute as Sir Morven were your father," said the old man, trying to look shocked at his presumption, but turning from tears to chuckles in the attempt.

Holt went on from tale to tale of old days on Roon, of cockfights and late carouses, of famous hay-harvests and fields of corn and pheasant-shoots, of the horses they had broken and the dogs they had trained, and of eccentric sportsmen long dead.

"Do you remember when I matched my Cheshire Pile against Lord Helbourne's Birchin?" the Knight asked.

"My goodness, I should think I did! Wi' silver gaffles they fought."

"And you got so excited, Holt, that you crawled into the middle of the pit, and his lordship shouted, 'Damme I didn't match my

Birchin against your setter-to, Romare,' and I had to haul you back into the corner by the seat of your breeches."

"My goodness, I *were* excited! And my goodness, weren't that Cheshire Pile a master fighter? We never had another to buckle to like he."

Whether it was the combination of 'Cheshire' with 'pile,' or whether it was merely that all these old tales of an unencumbered Roon were too poignant for the Knight, anyway after this last reminiscence he fell into a gloom and would give no more than a monosyllable to anything that Holt asked him. The old man jumped down from his chair, dabbed his forehead to the company, and trotted off home. Soon afterward Vivien and Venetia said good night and left the Knight sitting in a sombre reverie beside the fire.

"Vivien," said her sister when they were undressing, "I believe it's going to be quite easy to get Father to be sensible about Dick after Easter. He's beginning to repent of the Cheshire Cat."

"He repented long ago," Vivien replied. "But that isn't going to make him any more reasonable over Dick. Did you think his cheerfulness was genuine to-night?"

"I didn't at first. I thought he was drunk. But afterwards when Holt and he were talking I thought he really was more cheerful."

"Queer," said Vivien. "I never felt for a moment that he was really cheerful. I felt that he was in despair; and he was too. Venetia, I believe that he's much more in the claws of the Cheshire Cat than we think. I believe something dreadful is going to happen after Easter. Why does he keep talking about his coming after Easter? He's been down here on and off the whole Winter. But this next visit is for something special, and it isn't to become Father's partner."

"Vivien, darling, you do rather go about looking for trouble, don't you?"

"I don't have to look very far."

She shivered.

"It's cold to-night."

"More east wind," Venetia sighed. "And wet too," she added, as the rain began to patter against the casement.

When their father at last dragged himself out of his gloomy reverie and went up to bed nearly a couple of hours later, it was blowing hard from the east with a drench of cold rain.

About two o'clock, soon after he had fallen asleep, the Knight

was woken by a loud crash. He sat up in bed and lighting a candle looked round for an explanation of the noise. For a moment he was at a loss, though the appearance of the room was somehow unfamiliar. Then he saw with a shock that the portrait of his wife had fallen from the wall on which it hung over the fireplace opposite the foot of his bed. He jumped out and raised the prostrate picture, staring intently at the face of the slim dark woman in a black ball-dress who for over fifteen years now had gazed down upon him with her pale beauty.

"Margherita," he whispered in awe. And again most pleadingly, "Margherita," he whispered. He seemed to expect that those red lips would answer him, and once more he called upon her name, "Margherita, can't you understand that there is no other way out?"

The Knight lifted the portrait and rested it on the mantelpiece to lean it against the wall where it had hung. Then he lit two candles on either side, and getting back into bed lay for a long while regarding the face as if the flickering shadows from the candle-flames might bewitch that mouth to a semblance of the speech he craved to hear. Gradually he was drowsed by his own rapt contemplation. The slim black figure receded; the lustrous eyes were blurred; the red lips turned to the red rose in her hair, and the red rose to her lips. Then he came completely to himself with a start. His mind was clear. Sam Hockin must not take out that stone to-morrow morning. The promise must be kept. There would be another way out, and that was the message of the picture's fall. He jumped out of bed and dressed himself hurriedly. He must go down to Sam Hockin at once and countermand the order he had given. He did not wait to consider the folly of leaving his bed to go out into this night of east wind and icy rain. The thought that Sam Hockin would come up early to-morrow morning and unseal the stone possessed his mind to the exclusion of everything else. Once that box was before him he should never have the strength of will to resist making use of its contents to relieve himself from the strain of depending on Fuller's good will. So long as it was safely walled up he might manage to fight against the temptation to break the promise given to Margherita.

The Knight met the full force of the wind as he let himself out from the library door and crossed the lawn through the icy darkness. The iron gate between the pillars swung to behind him with a clang that sounded no louder in the noise of the weather than

the snap of a broken bough. The tall pine trees at the top of the drive were creaking in the blast. The wind was raging through the bare woodland of the slopes with the steady roar of a cataract, and the water was gurgling down along the gutters on either side of the road. But the Knight paid no heed to the weather. He strode downhill as fast as if it were daylight, following the reproachful eyes of his dead wife that burned before him. It was high water when he reached the gates of the drive above the harbour, where to all the noises of the easterly gale was added the crash of the breakers against the head of the pier and the grinding of the shingle on the beach in front of the Inn. The Knight was hammering on the door for a quarter of an hour before a light wavered in the upper story and the voice of the mason called down to know who it was.

The Knight proclaimed his identity, and in another minute Sam Hockin had opened the door to admit him. Soaked through, for in his anxiety to relieve his conscience he had neglected to put on an overcoat, the Knight stood up in the great stone-flagged recreation-room. His shadow, more gaunt and monstrous than his very self, which was gaunt and monstrous enough, shivered across the vaulted ceiling in the quaking light of the solitary candle.

"My dear life, Sir Morgan, you be drowned through and through!" Hockin exclaimed.

"Never mind about that. I've come down to say that you are not to take that stone out to-morrow morning."

"Very good, Sir Morgan."

"And listen, Sam, if I send you down an order to take out that stone, or even if I give you that order myself, you're to refuse to obey me, whatever I say. That box contains something which belongs to Miss Vivien and Miss Venetia. And only for them are you to take out that stone. Do you understand me, Sam?"

"I understand you, Sir Morgan. But I hope you won't never give me the order, because, begging your pardon, you're not the man a chap like me wants to cross."

"Never mind what I am. Never mind what I say or what I do. If you wish to serve me as faithfully as you've served me now for more than twenty-five years you'll serve me best by disobeying. Understand that."

"So be it, Sir Morgan," said the mason. "And now, Sir Morgan dear, leave me get up the fire again and hot up a glass of rum for 'ee. You're surely drowned through and through."

"I'm going back to the House at once," said the Knight sternly. "Do you think I came out to sit drinking rum with you at three o'clock in the morning? Once more, Sam Hockin, give me your oath that you'll not take out that stone except for my daughters."

"I won't touch it."

"Whatever I say or whatever I do?"

"For nothing, Sir Morgan."

"Thank you, Sam. You've relieved my mind. And not a word of this to anybody, because not a soul except us knows about that box."

The Knight turned abruptly and flung open the door through which the wind rushed furiously in to extinguish the candle.

"Lord save us, what weather!" the mason gasped.

But before he had closed the door Sir Morgan had vanished in the surging darkness.

With a light heart and the wind astern of him the Knight was not long in reaching the top of the hill. Back in his own room again he stared eagerly at the pale face in the picture.

"Rest in peace, Margherita," he murmured, crossing himself.

34

VIVIEN AND THE KNIGHT

The Knight caught a severe chill as the result of his sudden impulse to rise from his bed and seek Sam Hockin on such a night. He was not a man who tolerated illness with any patience; through neglecting his health he was by the middle of Passion Week seriously ill with pneumonia. The only person he could bear to have near him was Vivien, and she, in spite of Venetia's protests against the risk she was running of falling ill herself, nursed him all the time. Vivien, always moved by the spectacle of other people's helplessness or sorrow or pain, found this collapse of her father, who all her life had stood in her imagination as the paragon of human strength and self-reliance except when he was the victim of his mania for play, the most poignant of all.

For the better part of three days and nights Sir Morgan was delirious. Sometimes his mind would alternate between conjuring

goblins from the corners of the room and surrendering to paroxysms of invective against Caleb Fuller. Sometimes his fancy would travel back into the past, and he would re-live old scenes on Roon from his boyhood onward, uttering fragments of wild talk with men long dead or shouting passionate oaths in execration of follies and errors forgotten fifty years ago. He replayed old skittle matches, fought over again old mains with the gamecocks, rode over again old races, and staked afresh sums he had lost in early youth.

Grimacing at the mermaids worked in canary silk on the quilted green satin of the tester, the Knight lay in his great four-post bed valanced and hung with heavy crimson velvet and supported by gilded dolphins. Vivien sat beside him on a tabouret gallooned with tarnished silver and covered with a velvet which had been stained by age to the likeness of a blotched iris-petal. Throughout her father's ravings she held his white hand in her own white hand that so resembled his. There were moments in the strain of listening to him when she began to think that she and he were both of them wandering in the maze of the embroidered counterpane among those groves of golden-fruited trees where nested the phoenix, where lurked the cockatrice with blazing eye, and in whose shade hippogriffs roamed and dappled unicorns.

About twelve o'clock on the third night of his delirium her father suddenly spoke to her in his normal voice gently and sweetly:

"My dear child, you must be tired of sitting here holding my hand. I fear I am being a nuisance in my old age."

She rose and bending over kissed his forehead, smoothing back the fine hair which even now was threaded here and there with the flaxen of youth.

"No, no, I'm not at all tired. But I'm glad you're better," she said.

He thought for a moment before he replied in accents so deliberate as to sound almost ludicrously judicial.

"Yes, I think I *am* better, though I'm inclined to fancy that I wish I were not. Is Father Langherne here?"

"Yes. He will stay now until after Easter."

"So that supposing I were to have a relapse," said the Knight, "he would be at hand. Capital! Capital! Is that barley-water? Horrible stuff, but I think I could drink a little."

She held the glass to his lips.

"Thanks, thanks. Yes, I'm better. My breathing is quite definitely easier." He clicked his tongue in annoyance.

"What's the matter, Father?"

"Why, I was thinking that if only Bridegroom had won, none of this would have happened."

She stared at him. He seemed quite himself again. But when had Bridegroom failed to win?

"I stood to win £20,000," he went on solemnly. "And of course £20,000 would have obviated the least necessity for having anything to do with this man Fuller. And Bridegroom ought to have won. He was the last of my really good horses. But he let me down badly at Chester. No, no, it wasn't Chester. I was thinking of Fuller. No, it was at Newmarket that Bridegroom turned it up half a furlong from the winning-post." He clicked his tongue again.

"But that's a long time ago, Father," she pointed out.

"Oh yes, oh yes," he agreed. "That was—let me see—that was in 'seventy-eight. A long time ago, as you say, my dear child. But what I mean is that if Bridegroom had won at that Summer Meeting I shouldn't have had to take to baccarat. Vivien!"

"Yes, Father."

"Don't you ever take to baccarat. Yet, I don't know . . ." he mused, "if only you hadn't pitched away that find of mine under the Watchmen I believe I should have won back all and a great deal more than I lost. I can't think what possessed you to throw away that golden boat. It really was worth a very large sum of money indeed. Hardly less than a couple of thousand pounds. It was unique. That was the point. Absolutely unique. It might have been worth a good deal more. I don't reproach you, because you've been extremely kind and obliging during this tiresome chill I've had. Oh, very kind, my dear child, and I don't want to reproach you. Still, I think you ought to realize that I can't help blaming you a little for the muddle into which I seem to have got myself. I am in a muddle, you know. I take it you have guessed that I've committed myself rather more than I intended with this fellow Fuller?"

"I know that you've given him an option to become the part owner of Roon."

"Ah, but I've done more than that. Oh, yes, a great deal more. I've borrowed money from him. It was a foolish thing to do, but there was really nothing else for it last autumn. Between ourselves I didn't like to let down poor old Bulkely. You know who Bulkely is?"

"The manager of your bank."

"Precisely. I'm glad to see you're beginning to take an intelligent interest in my affairs, because you never know—of course, I'm very much better, but still you ought to have some idea of how things are. And you'll always find Bulkely very helpful. That's why I couldn't let him down; and if I hadn't managed to repay that overdraft it would have let him down badly with his directors. It's no use crying over spilt milk, but he saw me round a nasty corner. The fact is I owed a great deal of money in Aix when I came back—debts of honour, I mean to say—money I'd lost at play to those fellows. I should have been in a most unpleasant position. Oh yes, most unpleasant. So that I was really forced to borrow from Fuller when he couldn't see his way to come in at once over Roon. There was one other way I might have found the money, but I couldn't break a promise I made to your dear mother. That promise was made on behalf of you three children before she died. Of course, Murdo's loss made me feel rather bitter about Roon. I mean to say, you know how long we have been going on, and here am I the last Knight. I think I'm only just beginning to grasp that ineluctable fact." The long word pleased him. He rolled it on his tongue with a gloomy savour. "That ineluctable fact," he repeated. Then he was seized by another of his spasms of coughing, the frequency of which coupled with his raucous breathing and slow painful utterance had made listening to him a distressing ordeal for Vivien.

"Yes, I hadn't much use for Roon when my boy was killed," he went on. "And then you rather upset me by appearing to like that young fellow who's over at Carrackoon now, confound him."

"Why are you so prejudiced against him, Father?"

"Why? Why?" he repeated fretfully. "What a silly question, when you might know I regard his coming here as the principal cause of Murdo's death."

"But, Father, how unjust!"

"Not unjust at all. If it hadn't been for him, Murdo might have been here instead of getting killed to save a lot of frogs from being skewered by the Germans."

Vivien knew that it would be bad for him to argue, and though she could have cried out at the injustice of this point of view, she contained herself and said nothing. Were she to tell him that she loved Dick, it might put him in such a rage as might endanger his life in the present state of his health.

"However, I may tell you that I'm very pleased with the way you've behaved since this fellow came and planted himself down on Carrackoon," the Knight continued. "Give me your hand again." She did as he bade her, and he squeezed it affectionately. "Yes, I'm very pleased with you. And you must forgive me if for a time I seemed to resent your being a girl. I won't pretend I didn't. There, that's straight from the shoulder, eh? I dare say I might not have agreed to let Fuller have that option if you and Venetia hadn't been girls. However, as I said, it's no use crying over spilt milk. And what I've got to do now is to find some way of meeting the future. What's the date?"

"The twenty-seventh of March. To-morrow's Palm Sunday."

"This illness has been a fearful nuisance coming just now," said the Knight. "Just when I wanted all my wits about me to deal with Fuller I'm struck down. The point is this. In less than three weeks I have to make a payment of £1,300 to Fuller. Well, I suppose I can just manage that. In fact, I can. But it will clean me out, and I don't see where the money's coming from to keep up Roon unless Fuller takes up his option. So, what I want you to do, my dear, is to help me in every way you can to induce him to come in at once."

"I don't see what I can do," Vivien said.

"No, I don't quite see myself, to tell you the truth; but at any rate be pleasant to him. I'm quite sure that he has social ambitions. Make him feel at home here. Go out of your way even to—yes, even to flatter him a bit. Talk enthusiastically of how much you're looking forward to his being here for good. Eh? You'll find a way to do it. I know it's a nasty business, but it's got to be done. You see, if I'm not very careful he can sell up Roon. Not the island itself, but all my personal belongings; and we don't want to lose all these things, do we?"

"I'll do everything I can, Father," she promised.

"Good girl. Thank you very much. You've always been most sympathetic. I'm afraid I've not been exactly a model parent. I don't know. I never seem to be able to get used to the idea that I'm not what I was when I inherited from m'father. There's another reason why I'm anxious not to quarrel with Fuller. I know he wants to get rid of John Holt and Sam Hockin and all our dear old friends who've been with us so long. Of course, he can't do anything at present. But if I'm in default with my payments I shall be put in a difficult position, because if I have to take advantage of his leniency—well, he's the kind of chinchard who'll charge as

much for that as everything else. And now, by gad, I believe I'm feeling quite pleasantly sleepy. You go off and get a good rest yourself."

"Would you like Venetia to sit with you?"

"No, no; I have my bell. I can ring if I want anybody. Venetia fidgets me. She's young and thoughtless. She doesn't seem to understand that one sometimes *has* to do a thing, whether one likes it or not. She fidgets me. She sits looking at me in bed as if I deserved this beastly cold. Now, you don't fidget me. Oh dear, oh dear, I wonder what Fuller will ask for this time," he gasped wearily as Vivien bent over to make his pillow comfortable.

The Knight did not have to wait very long for an answer to that speculation. On the Friday after Easter Sir Caleb Fuller and his son arrived in Penzawn. whence he wrote to say how deeply sorry he was to hear of his friend's illness, and how much he hoped that he would soon be quite well again, and how anxious he was that for the moment he should not be bothering his head about the little business transaction that was due to be settled in another week.

I didn't want to put us both to the expense of paying a solicitor to write and notify you that the instalment would fall due on April 15th. So I thought it would be easier and pleasanter for both of us if I came down myself. But please don't think about business until you are quite, quite well. A week or two won't make any difference to me, and the extra interest can quite well stand over till next October, if it's any convenience to you. You know that in all this matter my chief concern has always been to relieve your mind of financial worry. So PLEASE don't bother about paying me back the instalment even a fortnight late if you aren't perfectly well. As I say, the extra £11 10s. 10d. of interest can be added to the October instalment. When business and friendship get involved, one doesn't want to be too much of a stickler for business. I've brought Norman down with me, but we will quite understand if you don't feel up to seeing us for a day or two, and we will be quite comfortable at the Queen's Hotel. I managed to sell the Butterfly last week, but I'm sorry to say that I had to accept a most disgraceful price for her. Not a third of what I paid only eighteen months ago!!! And Miss Upcott hasn't managed to sell any of the property in Australia or Canada. And though the Towers were put up for auction at the beginning of March, there wasn't a

single bid!!! So I'm afraid my ambition to become one of the two "Knights of Roon" will have to wait a little while yet.

Sir Morgan did not at all like the way his creditor seemed to assume that he deserved his pity. He begged Vivien to go over to Penzawn and insist on Sir Caleb and his son coming over to Roon.

"Tell him I've had nothing but a slight chill," he said. "Don't for goodness' sake let the fellow think I'm breaking up. He'll never take up the option. I tell you he has social ambitions, and half the pleasure of the place is what he calls being one of the two Knights of Roon. But make yourself agreeable to him, Vivien. Get it into his head that we want him here."

Vivien made herself so pleasant to both father and son that Sir Caleb began to recover some of the affection for the dear Romares he had lost when the Knight refused to give way to him over the orphans and the Chapel, over the letting of the Inn and the dismissal of his old servants. Norman, too, persuaded himself that Vivien was trying to express her regret for the rudeness of her sister in the Autumn; and he looked across the table meaningly at his father when the pair of them were entertaining her to lunch in the Queen's Hotel. Sir Caleb accepted the invitation to spend a fortnight at Romare's House with all his old mealy-mouthed fawning effusiveness. He was terribly afraid that he and Norman might be a trouble. He dreaded beyond anything that Sir Morgan would be disturbed by their presence. He could not bear the idea of intruding or of taking advantage of their kindness and hospitality. The fancy that he and Norman, by coming down to Penzawn at such a moment, might possibly convey the impression that they expected to be asked over to Roon was really distressing. But if they did venture to take their dear friends at their word and fly from the unpoetical surroundings of the Queen's Hotel to the peace of lovely Roon, it would, it *could* only be on the understanding that the invalid was not to worry himself about their presence. There would be such a lot to see to over the alterations and improvements. In fact, it was only the feeling that possibly it might relieve Sir Morgan's mind to know that the work done on Roon during the Winter would be thoroughly and critically examined by himself that inclined Sir Caleb to presume as far as to accept this more than kind invitation.

"But you really are sure that I won't be a nuisance, Vivien?" he entreated her to tell him once more, holding her hand in his

flabby grasp and gazing at her from eyes that were melting with the warmth of his emotion.

"Oh, yes," she said in some embarrassment. "I know Father will be quite hurt if you don't come over."

"Do you hear that, Norman?" Sir Caleb turned to ask his son, but not releasing Vivien from his hand, which seemed to be wrapped round hers like a tepid poultice. "Sir Morgan will be hurt if we don't go over and stay with him." Then he turned back to gaze at her with an expression of woebegone solemnity. "I wouldn't hurt your dear father for anything, and so Norman and I will come over on Monday afternoon, if you'll be kind enough to send the *Mermaid* for us. And thank you very, very much—thank you very much indeed for coming over so kindly and telling us all these nice things; which we do so much appreciate, don't we, Norman? Thank you. Thank you very much."

And the tepid poultice slipped off her hand at last.

The Knight refused absolutely even to keep indoors when the Fullers arrived.

"I don't want him to come and gulp over me as if I were a corpse already," he declared. "I want him to understand quite clearly that I'm by no means finished yet."

He spent the morning before his guests arrived in going through his accounts with Tom Bell.

"Well, Tom," he said at the end of the unpleasant operation, "when I've paid Sir Caleb Fuller £1,300 on Thursday I shall have exactly one shilling and fourpence halfpenny left."

"Yes, Sir Morgan."

"But I don't owe a penny to anybody?"

"No, Sir Morgan. Well, I couldn't quite say that. Varcoe, the contractor, allowed £85 for extras not specified, and I understand he's exceeded that according to his reckoning; but, of course, you aren't liable beyond the £85."

"Then it looks as if I must persuade Sir Caleb somehow to go in at once?"

"Yes, Sir Morgan. It does look like that."

The Knight was in the garden when Sir Caleb arrived without Norman. It was blue and white April weather, with a cold wind from the north-west, which, however, did not, except here and there, manage to break through the thick ilex belts and disturb the flowers within. In the oblong dedicated to Venus the air was like Summer, with the sun shining down on the rosy blossom of

the peach trees and on the daffodils that grew thick in their lightly trellised shade.

"I am so glad to see you up and about, Romare," Sir Caleb said. "I didn't bring Norman with me, after all. We felt it was trespassing too much on your good nature on top of your illness."

"There was nothing much the matter with me," the Knight said rather brusquely, as he compelled himself to advance through the bower of peach blossom to take the pultaceous hand of his guest.

"Tom Bell wrote and told me you were really most seriously ill," said Sir Caleb. "He seemed very anxious I should come down as soon as possible."

"I wish Tom Bell would mind his own business," the Knight exclaimed angrily.

"Oh, please don't be annoyed with him," Sir Caleb begged. "You know I've always thought he was the best man you've got. I think he really has your interests at heart, and I'm a little afraid that some of the other people haven't, though I think that Jervis is a good man, and Siddle is always very obliging to one."

The Knight frowned.

"Well, don't let's start that old discussion again, Fuller. I'm sure I don't know why you didn't bring your son with you. I told Vivien to make it quite clear that we expected both of you."

"Oh, she did," Sir Caleb said eagerly. "Oh, please don't think that Vivien was anything but most kind—really quite overwhelming in her kindness. Norman and I both felt that she was genuinely welcoming us. But——" He hesitated. "Well, it seems so ungracious, after so much kindness, that I hardly know how to say what I would like to say. But Norman was anxious that you and I should get through any little business we had before he came over, and so he's taking a little tour in a motor round Lyonesse. How lovely your garden is looking! That's fruit blossom, isn't it?" he inquired eyeing the trees.

"Peach blossom," the Knight told him.

Sir Caleb's eyes opened wide.

"Peaches! Do you ever get any fruit?"

"In favourable seasons."

"Fancy! And can you eat them?"

"They're not bad. But, of course, peaches don't do very well on this limeless soil and they really want glass by the sea."

"I've often wondered you don't grow more fruit in this lovely garden," Sir Caleb said. "Of course, flowers are very nice if one

can afford to indulge in such luxuries, and I dare say you'll think me very funny and old-fashioned if I confess that I like fruit and vegetables better than flowers. Though, of course, I don't understand flowers. If I was you I would have nothing but fruit and vegetables in this garden."

"We have a vegetable garden elsewhere," said the Knight irritably.

"Oh, I know, but it only seems to grow enough for the house, and I think Jervis feels that the best places are given to the flowers. If you had more vegetables you might sell fresh vegetables to the visitors who come over. It would be so nice if they could take back with them some nice fresh vegetables grown on Roon."

"Well, I'm not going to grow cabbages and beetroots in this garden for trippers to munch on the way home," said the Knight firmly.

Sir Caleb sighed over his dear friend's quixotry.

"I'm afraid you'll never make Roon pay," he said sadly. "Every little helps. Even empty tins ought all to be carefully collected and sold when you have enough of them."

"All the tin cans on Roon won't do much to help keep the island going," said the Knight.

"But every little helps," Sir Caleb insisted gently.

"What would help much more than a little would be if you could see your way to taking up that option forthwith," the Knight averred.

"I wish I could. I do wish I could."

"You've sold your yacht, and even if she didn't fetch what you hoped, you got the price of a good many old tins for her. It's no use beating about the bush any longer. When I pay you back this £1,300——"

"Only £1,000," Sir Caleb interposed. "The £300 is interest."

"Well, the point is that I have to find £1,300 on Thursday. That I can do. But I shall have nothing left to maintain Roon. Now then, what is going to happen?"

"I suppose I shall have to give you three months' grace," said the creditor, "as you've been so ill."

"Never mind about my illness. I don't ask for charity on that account. Everything will be perfectly easy for me if you take up that option."

"If I could, I would, Romare. But I can't. Still, I'm quite ready to give you this extra three months. The last thing I want

to do is to make things difficult for you. To be quite frank, I began to think once or twice this Winter that some of your family resented my being here. And I meant to say to you that if I felt that anybody didn't want me here I wouldn't like to force myself on them. But Vivien was so kind when she came over that I felt quite cheered up again. And so did Norman. I dare say you didn't hear of it, but there was a little uncomfortableness between him and Venetia during the winter. He was awfully upset about it, poor boy, and he told me he was sure that we weren't wanted on Roon, and when you seemed to dislike the idea of the orphans and the Chapel being used for nice homely little services and my having a lease of the Inn I began to fear he was right. So, please, Romare, if you feel any regrets about our little friendship, I do hope you'll be as frank with me as I have been with you."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense," said the Knight. "Young people will always have their quarrels. But about this extension of time for paying back the first instalment?" He hesitated, and cut down with his reaping-hook a nettle that had escaped the gardener's vigilance in a corner of peach-bloomed Venus. Then forgetful of Fuller's presence he wandered out of Venus into Jupiter where the perfume of mint and violets scented the April sunlight; and from Jupiter he came to the dark enclosure of Saturn where the only flowers in bloom were clumps of white hellebore powdered with the honey-coloured catkins of a willow that hung over them. The Knight leaned against the red-rusted trunk of a cypress and stared up at the white clouds flying past overhead as swiftly as swans across the azure sky. What was he to reply? Should he accept this offer as a genuine expression of good will? Or should he not by accepting plunge himself so deep into the mire of dependency as to make existence too unendurable? And in three months something might happen. The situation in Europe was changing every day. Some of his investments might recover in three months, and if the season was fine the flow of trippers might excite the cupidity . . . the Knight paused and laughed aloud. Cupidity! Of course, *that* was the word. There was the right word for everything. And whoever first applied cupidity to the lust for gold must have had a vision of some plump greedy middle-aged Cupid like Fuller. The Knight winced. Had not he himself lusted after gold? And if one went a-whoring after it like a gamester rather than taking it from the wife of one's bosom like a man of

business, had the gamester therefore the right to reproach the man of business?

"Are you feeling unwell, Romare?" Sir Caleb inquired solicitously. He had followed his host into this dark enclosure in spite of the danger from snakes or toads, the existence of which on Roon he could not help suspecting in spite of assurances to the contrary.

"Not at all unwell," said the Knight, jerking himself out of his reverie. "I was trying to make up my mind what to reply to your—to your generous offer."

Sir Caleb beamed. It was not that he was susceptible to flattery in the sense that flattery could persuade him into doing anything that he did not want to do; but he liked it, as people like sweets, without expecting it to prove nutritious.

"Couldn't we go and sit down somewhere?" he suggested. "I have another little suggestion to make; but it's rather a delicate little suggestion, and I think you oughtn't to be walking about all the time after your illness."

"I really wish you wouldn't keep on alluding to my illness," the Knight snapped. "A trifling cold is not an illness. However, I dare say *you'd* like to sit down."

With this he led the way to the circle of grass called Earth in the firmament of this garden; and there on the curved seat where Murdo and Vivien had sat in that May dusk all but two years ago he and his creditor eyed one another. The lilac was not yet in its prime, but already on the clusters of green buds isolated stars of blossom were breathing forth sweetness, and round the margin of the grass the cups of the scarlet and purple anemones shook with the bees that were gathering their grape-dark pollen.

"It was a great relief to me," Sir Caleb began, "when you told me that Norman and I were welcome on Roon. And when Vivien came over and was so extremely kind and nice to both of us, poor Norman felt quite cheered up. I wanted him to come over and tell you himself what he wanted to tell you, but he didn't like to mix up business with—er—tender feelings, and he begged me first of all to make your mind quite easy about this instalment. In fact before we go any farther I would like you to set your mind at rest about that. Both Norman and I feel it can easily be paid in June, though, perhaps, you might like to pay the interest now. That would leave you with a thousand pounds in hand."

"Of course, I'll pay the interest, and if—er—if it will be any pleasure to you, Fuller, I'm quite willing to accept your generous

offer," the Knight said more stiffly than he wished to express his obligation.

"You do like Norman, don't you?" Sir Caleb suddenly asked with great earnestness and looking at the Knight with a liquid appeal in his eyes that a hunted stag might have envied.

"Oh, yes, I like him very much."

Sir Caleb gulped.

"I can't tell you how proud it makes me feel to hear you say that. Of course, I spent a great deal on his education. But I don't regret a penny of it, especially now that one day he will succeed to my title. And you do think that he'll be a credit to my name, don't you?"

"I see no reason why he shouldn't."

Sir Caleb gulped again.

"I do hope you won't misunderstand what I'm going to say. I have felt once or twice that you've misunderstood my motives for saying things. I don't think you ever quite understood my idea in obtaining those orphans for you. But I would be dreadfully upset if you misunderstood me over this, because it would break Norman's heart. You see he wants to marry Vivien."

Sir Caleb's convulsive movement as he let this cat out of the velvet bag in which he had been carrying it so gingerly was not due to an attempt to dodge a blow from the Knight's sickle, but to a bee which came buzzing against his nose at that moment.

"But I don't know what Vivien will say," the Knight replied, with a perplexed frown.

"Oh no, of course, I quite understand that it entirely depends on her; but I wouldn't have liked Norman to speak to her without consulting you beforehand, and I'm sure you wouldn't have liked it either. And I believe Norman is right when he tells me that he has some reason to hope that Vivien rather likes him. Of course, he and I are both aware that you might think the suggestion rather presumptuous."

"Why should it be presumptuous?" the Knight barked.

"It's very kind of you not to think so. Of course, if Norman and Vivien married, I would settle a handsome sum on them immediately, and I know that Norman would consider the £10,000 loan as Vivien's dowry, and the covenant could be torn up. My idea would be for them to live at the Inn at present, but I would like to suggest that you left the island and all its contents to Vivien and Norman jointly on consideration that at your death a sum of

£10,000 should be paid by Norman to Venetia, so that she could be quite independent."

"What sum would you propose to settle on your son now?" the Knight asked.

"I would settle £50,000 immediately, and, of course, he will inherit everything I have on my death. Furthermore, I would be prepared to pay for any furniture that Vivien and he chose for their little house, so that you would be able to feel comfortable about yourself."

"But I thought you were so hard up, Fuller," the Knight could not resist saying.

Sir Caleb smiled in deprecation of the hint.

"Well, of course I wouldn't be able to afford a sacrifice like this except for my only son's happiness. And I wouldn't have been willing to help him in this way unless he had chosen a girl I like so very much myself. But Norman is very sensitive. He's nearly as sensitive as his father, and I don't think he would like to speak to Vivien unless he thought that she would welcome what he was going to say."

"You mean that you want me to find out first if Vivien is willing to marry him?" the Knight asked.

"If you *would* be so kind. Yes, that's just what I would like. Thank you so very much."

"And if Vivien refuses him?"

"Oh, dear, then, of course we would be just where we were," Sir Caleb sighed.

"Which means you wouldn't be able to take up the option at present?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't until either I managed to sell Bilkton or Miss Upcott manages——"

"Yes, yes," the Knight interrupted, "the contingencies are familiar to me by now. But there's another question. Vivien is a Catholic. Your son is not."

"I know. And of course, as I've told you, I haven't any strong religious scruples myself. Nor has Norman. I would suggest Norman's becoming a Catholic, because I know it wouldn't make any difference to him what he was. He and I both feel that these things are so unimportant compared with the simplicity of Christ's own life, though of course neither of us accepts the idea of His divinity. We think He was just a very good man—in fact, an exceptionally good man. We have the greatest respect for His teach-

ing. We think that everybody would be much the better for it. So please don't suppose that we have the least prejudice against Christianity. And as I say, if it would please you and Vivien, Norman would become a Catholic in no time."

"You mean out of politeness?" the Knight asked with a twinkling eye. "Well, I hardly think we should want him to strain his good manners to that extent."

"No, I rather expected you wouldn't care for him to become a Catholic in that spirit. But please don't think that either he or I would ever attempt to interfere with Vivien's religion. We would both of us respect it. Perhaps I might lend her some of Madame Blavatsky's books to read, but that would be the most I would do."

"All the children would have to be brought up as Catholics," the Knight insisted.

Sir Caleb gulped.

"Yes, I'm so glad you mentioned that little matter," he whispered shamefully. "Because, of course, Norman wouldn't have quite liked to refer to it, even to you. And now I think, if you don't mind, I would rather go back to Penzawn till I hear from you again. I'm afraid I told you a little fib when I said Norman had gone for a motor tour. He's waiting anxiously all this time at the Queen's Hotel, poor boy. And he'll be so happy when I tell him that you approve of the match. You do approve, don't you?"

"If Vivien loves your son, I shall not offer any objections."

"Thank you very much. No, please don't bother to walk with me to the gate. I know just how to open it. Perhaps you'll write to me to-morrow as soon as you've had your little talk with Vivien, though I feel quite happy about that."

But the Knight insisted on accompanying his guest to the gate of the garden. One of the few pleasures left to him in life was seeing the last of Sir Caleb Fuller, even if it was only for a very short while.

When the Knight was left alone, he crossed over to the other side of the garden and let himself out by the door that opened into the Knight's Walk. That he should suddenly break a rule he had kept for over fifty years by striding up and down this alley of ancient pine-trees to ponder the proposal Fuller had made him was significant of his broken pride. The mortification he had suffered as a boy from peppering his father's keeper at a shooting-party here was no longer of the least importance. He did not tell himself this in so many words. The incident was swept from his memory by the surge of present mortifications. He shunned the sombre

shadows of his library on that blue and white April afternoon, and, oblivious of everything except the need for a grave decision, he sought this level and tranquil spot to escape from the curious glances of gardeners while he was reaching that decision. It was windless here save at the far end where the north-west breeze cut shrewdly round the shelter of the pines and ruffled the fallen needles in the path. At intervals the sunlight streamed down between the dark green domes of the trees like shafts through the windows of a clerestory; but the alley was not fired from end to end as on that April evening when Vivien and Dick trysted here. Southward Nanjizel Top was covered with the false verdure of beggarweed and pickpurse and hungry charlock, as far as where the pinewood rose to mask the glittering sea so that the top of Carrackoon looming behind it but beyond seemed an extension of Roon. Nothing broke the stillness except the song of larks rising and falling and sometimes the crackle of a pine-cone beneath the muffled footsteps of the Knight striding up and down the thick brown carpet of needles in his Walk. Up and down, up and down he strode until the westering sun had coppered the trunks of the pines and the brisk wind expired in a perfumed sigh. Up and down, up and down he strode until at cockshut-time a bat came tumbling and fluttering along this alley with weak ambiguous flight as though it were the exemplar of the Knight's mind.

"Let her decide," he murmured at last, as he turned back into the garden and passed out through the gate into the shrubbery where hidden by the white rhododendrons whose fragrance was heavy on the vesperal air he gazed for a while at the light in the tower and listened to the faint noise of dinner preparations tinkling forth from the kitchens. Suddenly an immense fatigue gripped him. The light in Vivien's tower receded until it seemed as remote as the pale fire of Venus in the western sky.

"Yes, yes, she must decide what is to happen," he murmured. Raising his sickle in a fit of exasperation with everything, he severed a tress of white blossom that floated over the path like a great moth and walked on with faltering steps toward the house.

After dinner the Knight asked Vivien to come and talk to him in the library. She was startled by the request, because this afternoon she had sent a letter to Dick to say that she would meet him tomorrow on the beach before Blood Cave where she could tell him what was happening on Roon and discuss with him their course in the immediate future. Her father's preoccupation all through

dinner followed by this grave request for her presence in the library made her fancy for a moment that he had found out about her letter to Dick. She looked across to Venetia, who shook her head to reassure her of the impossibility of what she feared. But she did not feel at ease until her father opened the conversation by saying that he wanted to acquaint her with the exact state of affairs between Sir Caleb Fuller and himself.

"So you see, Vivien," he concluded, "I'm in an exceedingly awkward position, none the less awkward because the fault is . . ." the Knight hesitated. He found it hard even now not to put some of the blame on the unreasonable behaviour of the cards and the roulette-wheel. "Of course, I did have exceptionally bad luck, but still the fault is entirely my own," he brought himself to acknowledge. "I ought to have been more prudent. In justice to Sir Caleb I am bound to say that when he heard how awkward it would be for me to repay the first thousand pounds he offered at once to wait until June."

"That was very nice of him," Vivien said.

"At the same time," her father went on, "I can't pretend that I enjoy taking a favour from the man. His ideas and mine never coincide, and by accepting such a favour it will make it much more difficult to refuse him various preposterous things he wants."

The Knight paused, drained his brandy, and helped himself to another glass.

"I seem to be drinking a great deal more brandy nowadays," he said apologetically. "I seem to be feeling the effect of that chill more than I need at my age."

"It was rather more than a chill," Vivien insisted. "You really oughtn't to have gone out to-day."

"Fresh air hurts nobody," he said. "I'm feeling all the better for it. But even if I do accept this favour with all the inconveniences it will entail of having to humour Fuller's Urban District Council mind, the ultimate future presents an insoluble problem. Insoluble," he repeated, and drained the second glass of brandy. "Insoluble," he reiterated, pouring himself out a third. "It means this, Vivien. It means that we must lose Roon."

"Only the half of it, surely?"

"No, the whole of it. I am convinced that Fuller never intends to take up this option. Why should he? I must default next June. Very well. What will he do then? He will call upon me to give

him a bill of sale. He will take the best of our possessions, and in order to maintain Roon until the five years of his option expire I shall have to go on selling and selling until there's nothing left except the island itself. Then he will make me an offer for that, and either he'll get it or I shall have to sell it to somebody else, and retire with you two girls into obscurity. Mercifully you will neither of you be entirely unprovided for after my death. I have managed to ensure that. But Roon is lost to us. It's quite clear to me that this scheme of mine for making money out of trippers is no use unless the place is developed to a quite intolerable extent. I've an idea that Fuller by turning this house into an hotel could make a good thing of it. But that would require capital, and it would no longer be our house, even though I suspect he would be glad to keep me on the island as an attraction—a kind of harmless ghost to be stared at by romantic old maids, a survival of the past like an Aztec, a freak to entertain plutocrats in the billiard-room after dinner. That's unthinkable, you'll agree. Yes, Roon is lost to us unless . . ." He stopped.

"Unless what, Father?"

"Tell me, Vivien, do you like young Fuller?"

"He might be much worse."

"Yes, yes, he might, mightn't he?" said the Knight eagerly. "I was afraid at one time that you were getting yourself mixed up with that young man on Carrackoon. In fact he had the impudence to come here and ask for your hand in marriage. I didn't mention anything about it, because he assured me that you knew nothing of his aspirations, and I need scarcely tell you what a relief that was to me."

"I can't undeceive him now," Vivien was saying to herself. "I can't tell him now on top of his illness and his anxiety over this debt. It would be too cruel."

And in the same breath that she decided this she was asking why, why, why Dick had ever told her father that lie about themselves. Had he but known it was by her will Dick landed here that December day, he might—indeed he certainly would have been no less bitterly opposed to the marriage, but at least she would have been spared the misery of pretending this indifference. And in her mind, such was the strain under which she had been living ever since that April dawn when Dick went back to France, the faint shadow of a cloud was thrown across their love, and now for the first time instead of saying to herself "When? When?"

she whispered within the deep recess of her heart, "Will it ever be?"

And all this happened within herself while her father was draining his third glass of brandy, after which in a burst of petulance with the weakness that was tormenting him he flung the empty glass into the fire.

"There is one way out," he said, staring at his daughter with eyes that glittered as lately she had seen them glitter at the phantoms of the past sweeping to and fro across his feverish vision. "You are the only one who can save Roon for us. You, Vivien, only you."

"What can I do, Father?" she asked tremulously.

"Young Fuller has asked my consent to propose to you."

Vivien sat dazed as by a volley of thunder crashing immediately over Romare's House.

"Naturally I explained to his father who was the ambassador that it lay entirely with you. I would exercise my right to forbid you to marry a man I considered unsuitable, but I would not try to persuade you into marrying anybody against your will."

"But do you think Norman Fuller suitable for me?" she asked, and to herself her voice sounded so far away that she was amazed when her father answered the question.

"In different circumstances I don't know that I should," he said. "Not that I have any objection to the young man himself—and you rather like him, don't you?" He did not wait for his daughter to reply. "At the same time I can't pretend I like the father. Well, he's not my style exactly. But it's useless nowadays to contend with the speed at which people are turned into gentlemen any more than to deplore the speeding up of everything else. And I don't know why I should object to my daughter's marrying a young man out of commerce any more than I should have objected to Murdo's marrying a young woman out of commerce. The fact remains that, if you can and will marry young Fuller, Roon is safe for as many more hundreds of years as we have already held it. Your heir might take your name—my name. It could probably be managed. Fuller evidently has much more money than we supposed, or at least than he was willing to admit. He is ready to settle £50,000 immediately on you and your husband. My debt is to be considered your dowry. I am to be provided for, and on my death Venetia is to receive £10,000 from you on succeeding to Roon, to which I shall be able to add as much again." The Knight turned his eyes to the turret wall. "That will make her a

good match for any young man she fancies. From a material point of view there is nothing to be said against this match. But it rests entirely with you."

"To save Roon," Vivien said in a dead voice.

"No, I meant it rested with you whether you would marry this young man. I dare say you don't love him in the way that girls dream of love. But at least your heart is free."

"Oh, Dick, why, why, why did you tell that lie about us? I should never have been asked to do this horrible thing if you hadn't told that lie. And if I say now that I can't marry Norman Fuller because I love you, it will kill him perhaps."

She sat in silence gazing before her from eyes that agony had dreadfully dislusted. She saw nothing except that lie of Dick's creeping away into the darker shadows of the room it had haunted ever since it was uttered here. Then she looked at her father in alarm. Had she called aloud that cry of her heart? No, he was just sitting there waiting for her to say what she would do to save Roon. And Dick was coming over to-morrow to know what she thought was best to do. And whether she said "Yes" or whether she said "No" to her father, that would be the last time he would row across from Carrackoon. If she could not sacrifice herself to save Roon, Roon would be lost, and wherever her father went she would have to go. He would never reproach her for not marrying Norman Fuller. He would never urge her to marry him. He would take the blame for everything. And it would be her duty to make the best of life for him. So whether she said "Yes" or whether she said "No" to Norman Fuller, she must say "No" to Dick. Poor Dick! She could never abandon her father if through her selfishness he lost Roon. He would never press her to marry Norman Fuller.

"Oh, Father," she cried, "I don't think I can tell you now. You must let me have to-night."

"Why, of course, my dear child."

"And do go to bed now, Father. You look absolutely worn out. I'll come up presently and see that you are comfortable."

The Knight agreed at once, and the pathetic way he was trying to show her by his unwanted docility how much he now depended on her tugged at Vivien's heart unbearably.

When she came up to his room, he was sitting up in bed gaunt and pale against the cramoisy hangings.

"Father, you've lighted every candle in the room," she exclaimed.

"I couldn't get enough light," he said. "That picture of your mother requires a lot of light to see it properly."

She asked him if he wanted so many candles left burning.

"Don't they try your eyes? You've got six on the mantelpiece."

But he would not let her extinguish any of them.

"I can always shut my eyes," he told her.

She drew near the bed to bid him good night. He put up his hand and fondled her hair for a moment.

"If all the gold in the world were as innocent as that," he murmured. "Is Roon to lose that gold as it lost its fairy gold? But listen, my dear child, you must not give us your gold unless you can give it without pain to yourself. God forgive me, if I have asked too much of you. God forgive me for everything. I have been a most inadequate creature."

He turned to look at an old ivory crucifix on the table beside the bed. Then he stretched out his hand and picked up a small but thick book bound in vellum with silver clasps, which he gave to his daughter.

"Vivien, before you go would you be so kind as to read me Compline?"

He leaned back among his pillows while she sat on the tabouret beside him and read the office. To one who had heard and seen these two in that candle-lit room it would have seemed as if the present had been obliterated, so much did they belong to the past. That slim golden-haired girl in her dress of faded rose silk seated upon the stained purple velvet of that ancient tabouret and reading in her low clear voice the Latin words of comfort might have been the daughter of Roon's first Knight; and that gaunt handsome old man leaning back among his pillows belonged as little to the present time as the effigies of his forefathers in the Chapel yonder.

"Thanks, my dear child," he said when she had finished. "Thank you. It is a gracious and consoling office. *Te lucis ante terminum*," he murmured softly. "*Te lucis ante terminum*. Perhaps on second thoughts you had better snuff the candles; I think I'll turn over and try to sleep. Only if you can, my dear," he said, holding her hand when she leaned over to kiss his forehead. "Consider it from every point of view; but only if you can, my dear, only if you can. The rest of us will sleep for ever on Roon whatever you and I do, wherever you and I go."

She blew out the candles and left her father alone in the darkness.

As she opened the door she stopped, thinking she heard a mouse scratching. Then she realized that it was the sound of his rosary. On an impulse she turned back and kissed him on the lips.

"You'll sleep well?" she begged. "You won't lie awake and worry about me?"

"No, no," he promised. "I think I shall sleep better to-night than I have slept for a long time."

When Vivien went up into the schoolroom she found her sister turning over an old photograph album, the one she had looked at with Dick by that wintry sunset, it seemed in another world.

"They're getting frightfully faded," Venetia exclaimed. "There won't be any record left soon of our innocent childhood. We look like ghosts in half of them, pale brown ghosts melting into a pale brown ghost of an island. What have you been talking about? You look scared. What is it? Cheer up. Don't forget Dick will be waiting for you at six o'clock."

Vivien shivered.

"There's nothing to shiver about. The wind has dropped dead and the sky's full of stars. I've set the alarm clock, and all is well."

Vivien longed to tell Venetia that all was less well than it had ever been. But she feared her impetuosity. She was capable of dashing down into their father's room and creating a scene. After all, she had to decide for herself. Venetia could say nothing more against marrying Norman Fuller than she could say to herself. The fight must be fought alone.

"You'd better get to bed," she said.

"Why, what are *you* proposing to do?" Venetia asked.

"I want to go down to the Chapel for a little while."

"Down to the Chapel?" Venetia gasped.

"Yes."

"But, Vivien darling, what on earth for? Have you got religious mania or something? I should have thought you'd had enough of the Chapel after last week."

"Well, I'm going anyway," said Vivien.

And leaving her sister to shake a bewildered red-brown head, she went down the dark stairway of the tower and through the low pointed arch that joined it to the main portion of Romare's House. She hurried along the stone-flagged corridor on the other

side of the library until she reached the Chapel door. The air from within struck chill as she opened it and made her way toward the chancel through the prie-dieu chairs scattered about the little north transept.

35

VIGIL

The Chapel of the Romares was built over a crypt that contained the mortal remains of the Knights and Dames whose effigies in stone or brass or marble crowded the walls. On either side of the little chancel were half-a-dozen oak miserere seats, the arms of which supported by rudely carved mermen held sockets for the big wax candles that were still the chief source of illumination. The windows in rough perpendicular style with diamond latticing ran in a line along the south side immediately below the hammerbeam roof; and above the north door leading outside from the transept there was an elliptical rose-window containing the armorial bearings of Romare in stained glass. The altar was of granite, the reredos of wood grotesquely carved and richly painted. This extraordinary piece represented the Risen Christ above the sea adored by mermaids, tritons, dolphins and other watery creatures. In the lower right-hand corner the first Knight of Roon as donor was depicted in full armour kneeling upon a diminutive island that looked like a green footstool. In the other corner on an equally diminutive island knelt Sir Morven, the dim progenitor of the family, with his wife Melusine.

Vivien gazing by the light of one big wax candle at this scene which had been the joy and wonder of her childhood, the joy and wonder of how many children of Romare's House, apprehended with a shock of dismay that if her father was in default this reredos might be the first heirloom that Sir Caleb Fuller would seize. Until this moment she had been thinking vaguely of a quantity of furniture from which he would recoup himself—furniture one would much rather not lose, but still the loss of which would not strike at the very heart of their family life. If he should demand this reredos? She remembered with dismay that one of the various experts he had brought down at different times to advise him about

this or that on Roon had spent an hour in the Chapel, and that coming in to see what he was doing she had found him with a magnifying glass examining this ancient reredos, from which he seemed to drag himself away with reluctance as if he could not bear the idea of leaving it behind. He would have told Sir Caleb of its uniqueness, and Sir Caleb would have asked how much it was worth, and would perhaps have been told so large a sum that ever since he had been pining to offer it to some man even richer than himself who could put it over his dining-room mantelpiece and frame it with electric lamps. Vivien looked round guiltily at the effigies of her ancestors to whom as much as to her father this reredos belonged. Each one of them as a child must often have let his imagination play round that fantastic scene to charm away the boredom of long psalms; and, when the sun was streaming in through the windows on Summer mornings and bird-shadows were flickering across the Chapel walls, each one of them as a child must often have longed to be out of doors with the sun and the birds instead of having to listen to the droning of some slow old priest; and for a diversion from the endless Latin his fancy must many times have put him into that painted reredos, must have put him on a dolphin's back to adore the Risen Christ with more profit to his soul than by dangling his legs in the stall and perhaps being whipped after Mass for bringing the miserere seat down with such a profane bang in the middle of the Credo. And when those children grew up and could attend more devoutly at Mass, there must still have been moments when, if Father John was spinning out his sermon unduly, they would stare at the reredos and try to dream about their childhood and about the fun they had always had on beloved Roon. But most of all when death was near each would have thought how in a little while his effigy would join the others and look for ever on that painted scene with eyes that would never blink when the warm June sunlight flashed upon his brass accoutrements, with ears that would never hear the birds outside, with hands for ever clasped in dumb prayer above a heart for ever still. Before he died each would have pictured himself in sleepless sleep through the centuries in this familiar Chapel; and should his dying fancy be mocked by robbing him of anything on which in life he had gazed, the descendants who had robbed him for their own gain would commit as great a sacrilege as though they should take his bones from the crypt below and scatter them to the dogs. During all the worst persecutions of the Faith, it was the boast of Romare

that Mass was said openly on Roon. What would Sir Mordred feel whose alabaster ruff seemed even now to be quivering wrathfully in the candlelight at the thought of spoiling his chapel—Sir Mordred who had stood on the beach and cut down half a dozen of the Protestant mob that leapt ashore thinking to desecrate and plunder Roon so easily? Or Sir Meriadek who stood so stoutly for King Charles and against whom Cromwell had just given orders to despatch an armed force when England by the grace and mercy of God was rid of him? Or that Sir Morgan who rode northward to join the rightful Prince of Wales and was beheaded on Tower Hill with other great gentlemen, and whose son it was that planted Carrackoon with trees? And what would Murdo feel whose bones lay away from the earth of his ancestors? What *would* Murdo feel?

Vivien rose from the stall and knelt on the stone flags where beside the black and gold picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour the marble tablet commemorating him glimmered deathly white against the granite walls.

*Of your charity pray for the soul of Murdoch Romare,
an Ensign in the Grenadier Guards, the only son and heir
of the last Knight of Roon, who was killed by enemy air-
craft on St. Margaret's Day, 1918.*

Jesu Mercy

Mary Help

R.I.P.

His sister turned her face up to the picture which had been placed there by their father in memory of their mother, whose favourite Madonna it had been, thinking of how she and Murdo had sat in this chapel on either side of that mother, whispering questions to her about that painted reredos, which she never failed to answer, difficult though it must sometimes have been to tell them why this mermaid's tail stuck up out of the sea so much higher than that one's. But there was no earthly mother left of whom now to ask a question more perplexing than any; and Vivien begged for guidance from the Mother of God. And while she prayed it seemed to her that from every shadowy corner the damsels of her house stepped forth to stand beside her. In wimples and ruffs, in farthingales and mantuas and Empire gowns, they came, those Morgwens and Melisendes and Melusines, regarding with severe eyes the thoughts of one of the two last daughters of Romare's House. And it seemed to Vivien that each one of

them in turn came and filtered through her mind, leaving behind her ghostly transit the thought of a sister who had sacrificed herself that she might live in virgin peace on Roon. Presently, too, came all the Dames, whose blood flowing in this daughter of theirs, murmured through her veins of the dowries of gold they had brought to Roon, of the duty they had owed and paid whether it was made sweet by true love or bitter by regret for true love lost.

"Why do you come whining here?" they demanded. "You brought this on yourself. You challenged our island, and when the challenge was accepted you want to shirk your duty. What does your individual happiness matter compared with the happiness of all of us? Is Roon more to you than it is to all of us? Go out from here, and ask the Island what it would have you do."

"Mother of God, must I give up my love?" she moaned.

As she uttered this lament the carcase of a bat falling from the roof put out the solitary candle; and in horror Vivien fled toward the door in the north transept, which after a long struggle in the blackness with the bolts and bars she managed to open. The starry night without was soft as velvet, soft indeed, sweet and soft as the dark flowers of heartsease after the sepulchral air of the Chapel, after the cold reek of death and the dankness of frigid cenotaphs.

Vivien hastened over the top of the island toward Rosevean through a night so breathless that if ever she paused to listen she could hear the grass stirring in the dew, and almost, she could fancy, the gingle of the starry possession. It was past twelve o'clock, and the wizened moon would not be up till dawn. Neither bird nor moth nor rabbit moved abroad. The placid sea round the island was trailed with the sheen of stars; but Vivien hastened on her way by primrose-light, for Rosevean was oversprent thicker with those pale flowers that night than Heaven itself with stars. She came at last to the granite boulders that tumbled down the face of the cliff in their immutable cascade, and perched upon the outermost plunge of the stone she sat staring at the hump of Carrackoon rising darker from the dark water round it and framed with stars. So clear was the southern sky, swept by the north-west breeze which had dropped at dusk, that red Antares was plain to see scattering his rubies to the rim of the ocean, and high in the west the faint tresses of Berenice were not so much outblazed even by the brilliants of the Northern Crown. Vivien wondered if Dick knew the constellations as well as she did. They had never been together on a night

of stars; and now perhaps they never would be. What was Dick doing at this moment? The house on Carrackoon was dark. Was he asleep already, asleep and dreaming of him and her to-morrow? Oh, that he were here to sit beside her and gaze up at Arcturus darting his golden rays toward the zenith. And that cold white star hanging now above Carrackoon? That must be Spica in the constellation of Virgo. Yes, for there was the silver beak of Corvus already pecking at the stone wall that ran along the top of the little island.

"But what is the use of sitting here and wondering if Dick is asleep or awake? And what is the use of discovering where the stars are when I can't discover where *I* am?"

To sit here like this in love-sick meditation was not helping her to answer her father's question to-morrow morning. Nor would Roon itself express its will out here on Rosevean, when it lost so much of its character, as if by perpetual nearness to the other island it had been beguiled into partaking of a kindlier personality.

Vivien dragged herself away from the contemplation of Dick's dark house and turned back across the top of the island toward the north.

"I'll forget all about ancestors and elemental spirits and Father's worries," she said to herself. "And I'll just concentrate my mind on exactly what marriage with Norman Fuller will mean. And first I must put out of my head all thoughts of Dick."

It was a brave resolution, but by the time Vivien had turned aside from the road and climbed to the summit of Big Tor she was sick with apprehension of that future. When it was necessary, she could face ugly facts as well as anybody; and all along that road, which unwound before her now like a fold of grey gauze, now chatoyant as a cat's-eye, she had affronted the ugly facts of marriage with Norman Fuller in all its implications. She sank down upon the grass and mingled her hot tears with the cold dew.

"I can't do it," she sobbed. "I can't. I can't."

Then she knelt and supplicated the island with outstretched arms.

"Roon! Roon! Is there no other way? Must I give you myself for all that we have taken from you, for all that you have given to us?"

It seemed to her that the ground throbbed as with a muffled thud of drums approval of the sacrifice and that the air of the island sighed a contented 'yes' and that the sea she loved so well broke on every beach and rock with a dolorous 'yes.'

"Roon! Roon!" she cried. "I will do what you want!"

And this time for answer a puff of hot breath fanned her neck. She turned her head in affright to see looming above her the bull. On any other occasion Vivien would have spoken to him quietly, picked up the dangling stump he had managed to uproot, and led him back to his stall. But her nerves were in no state for dealing with a loose bull to-night. Jumping to her feet she uttered a loud shriek, and fled from him down the steep northern slope of Big Tor. Looking back from the bottom she could still distinguish his dark form against the stars, and forthwith she set out to run as fast as she could over the hollow wasteland toward the sea. All the way she still seemed to feel his hot breath scald her neck, and in the half-crazed state of her mind she fancied that they were the kisses of Norman Fuller which defiled her. When she reached the wide wet beach sheened by starlight, she tore her clothes from her fevered body to seek refreshment and purification in the ice-cold quiet sea. And as she swam with the lazy tide she was seized by a great longing to swim on until she met the current swirling round by White Lady Rock, the current that would take her out and out, out beyond the Garms, out into the Atlantic, out and out until like a star she should drop below the rim of the sea.

But at the moment when this dim outward faring seemed impossible to resist any longer, so completely had the cold numbed all her senses, there sounded a shrill voice calling from the island:

"Vivien! Vivien! Vivien, come back!"

For an instant she fancied that this voice was the voice of Roon itself calling to her, and for an instant she was thinking how the island might be sorry now when it was too late and she was so near the outward flowing current that with a few more strokes it would lose her for ever.

"Vivien, you idiot! *Will* you come back?"

Why, of course, it was Venetia calling, and turning in toward the island, she was soon in her depth again and able to plunge ashore through the phosphorescent shallows.

"I say, have you gone utterly mad?" Venetia demanded in the exasperation of fright. "I went down to find you in the Chapel, and you weren't there. And then I looked all over the island, and then I found your ring, and then I heard you shriek, and then I found William the Conqueror wandering about. He's got loose, and I thought he'd gored you or something. And then I could just see you like a ghost running across the towans. And now you're shivering with cold. Vivien, you really are a moke."

"You found my ring? Dick's ring?" Vivien whispered in a voice fey with terror.

"Yes, here it is. I tripped and fell into the ditch by Bramble Hop gate and picked it up with a handful of grass. It was just before you shrieked."

"It was just before the island said 'yes,'" Vivien whispered.

"I think you've gone quite mad," Venetia said sternly.

"It has given me back my gold. And it has taken me instead."

Vivien turned as if she were minded to plunge once again her starlit body beneath the kindlier sea.

"Vivien, do get your clothes on," her sister begged. "Perhaps you'll be able to talk more sensibly then. Fancy swimming at two o'clock in the morning in April!"

"I was hot," Vivien said, and her teeth chattered pitifully.

"Well, you're not hot now. Do put your things on and hurry back and get into bed. You seem to have forgotten that you're meeting Dick in the morning."

Vivien dressed herself in silence. When they were clambering up the glissade of sand by Romare's Watchmen back to the land, Venetia said:

"You'll lose that ring again if you don't put it on your finger."

"I'm not going to put it on ever again," Vivien replied in a hollow voice. "And I'm not going to meet Dick in the morning. I want you to meet him instead and give him a letter from me."

"Well, if there was a moon, I'd say you were moon-struck," Venetia declared. "What is the matter with you?"

It was then that Vivien told her sister about Norman Fuller's proposal.

"And you mean to say that you're going to accept him?" Venetia exclaimed. "You're going to make Dick miserable for life so that Father's old age, *which* he's brought on himself, can be peaceful and prosperous? Pooh! Bah! I never heard such an infernal thing."

"Venetia, please don't talk about it any more. You can't tell me anything I don't know already. But I can't let Father become a beggar."

"He won't become a beggar," Venetia interrupted. "People always think that they're going to be beggars as soon as they can't do everything they want just when they want to do it."

"Yes, but I'm mostly to blame for everything. I threw away that sun-boat. I dared the island to bring a rich man here. And

by falling in love with Dick and being happy when the garrison was here, and telling you that morning he went away I would be more unhappy to hear that Dick was killed than Murdo, I brought more ill luck upon us. And now it will mean our losing Roon unless I marry Norman Fuller."

"Then let's lose Roon. If you go to Father and tell him that you love Dick and are going to marry him, he'll come round gradually. Dick might give him the cottage on Carrackoon to live in, if the Cheshire Cat turns him off Roon."

"Oh, I've argued all this out with myself," Vivien said wearily. "And I know that I've got to do this. And the way the island has given me back the ring shows that it wanted me to."

"Vivien, you make me tired. You really do. I feel as if I was arguing with a lunatic one meets in a dream. Then, of course, though you don't say so, I know my future comes into this, which is simply damnable. I will not be a lost cause or an impossible loyalty, or any of the other silly things that Oxford is. You treat me like a kid of two, but you forget, owing to having practically educated myself, I really know a great deal more about everything than you do, because you were hampered by a governess, and I wasn't."

The two sisters walked on in silence after this outburst until they reached the tower. In the schoolroom Vivien sat down to write to Dick.

"Do you mean to say you really are going to break off with Dick?" Venetia demanded hotly.

"There's no other way," Vivien said.

Venetia snatched the ink-pot up and flung it out of the window.

"I intend to settle this matter," she announced, running to the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going down to Father, and I shall jolly well wake him up and put things a little more clearly to him than anybody else seems to have done."

"Venetia, you're not to."

"Aren't I? I am. And you're not going to have a word to say in the argument."

With this she slipped out of the room and locked the door behind her.

Vivien was too much exhausted by the strain of the past four hours to worry any more, or even to care much, what happened

next. She went into the nursery and flung herself down on the bed in an annihilation of all emotion. After a minute or two she was fast asleep.

So profound was that sleep that, when Vivien woke suddenly to find the yellow morning sunlight warm upon her cheeks and Dick kneeling beside the bed, she threw up an arm and drew his head close down to her breast, supposing that he was beside her in some sweet waking dream from which she must presently be disenchanted.

"Heart of hearts," he begged, "couldn't you sleep a little while yet?"

"Kiss me," she murmured softly. "A long, long kiss, my loved one."

She closed her eyes when his lips touched hers, closed them to stay from waking out of this exquisite dream.

Then abruptly she pushed him from her in affright.

"Dick, what are you doing here?" she cried. "If Father heard you were on the island, he would——"

"Vivien," he interrupted gently, taking her hands. "Vivien dear, I have bad news to tell you. Your father is dead. Venetia found him dead. He had died in his sleep; and when she came back to the tower and found you asleep she was afraid you were dead too, and she rowed over to Carrackoon to fetch me. Poor kid, she was in a terrific state of agitation."

Venetia came into the nursery at this moment.

"Vivien, darling, don't be too dreadfully upset. He's much happier as he is than arguing with the Cheshire Cat. And he must have died quite happy, because he had his rosary in his hand and he looks just as if he was fast asleep. He must have died soon after you left him. He was icy cold. You see, I touched him to wake him up and argue things out with him. And then I came running back to you, and you were quite cold too, and oh, darling," she cried, bursting into sobs, "I thought you were dead too. We've sent the *Mermaid* to fetch Dr. Merrilees, and perhaps there won't have to be an inquest. I do hope there won't, because poor Father would so hate being inquested, especially in his own house. And I told Hamblyn that if the Cheshire Cat wanted to come over he wasn't to bring him, and I think Hamblyn hopes he'll try and insist on coming, because I think he hopes he'll be able to get an excuse for throwing him overboard."

"Venetia, don't talk like that."

"Oh, darling, I *am* so glad you feel up to correcting me. And listen. I told Dick all about last night and what you thought you had to do, and he was frightfully understanding, much more than I was; but he's sure he can manage to find money to pay off the Cheshire Cat, aren't you, Dick?"

"Well, I'll have a good try," he said. "But I must find out exactly what the situation is."

"And, Vivien, I've arranged that Dick is to have the Old Blue Room, because just for a bit I think we'd like to have him on Roon."

"And when the doctor goes back," Dick said, "I'd better go over and interview Fuller. You'd rather not have him over here, would you, Vivien?"

He looked at her anxiously. He was not so sure as Venetia that the death of her father would make her change that resolve it had cost her so much to reach.

Then she looked at him; and she knew that whatever threatened Roon she could not save it, if to save it meant hurting him.

"Put your ring on my finger," she whispered, giving it to him.

He placed the frail circlet of pallid gold upon her finger, looked at the sea-blue stone a moment sparkling in the benign morning sun, looked up into her sea-blue eyes, and took her in his arms.

36

WHERE THE TALLEST FOXGLOVES GROW

Dick returned from his interview with Sir Caleb Fuller rather pessimistic about the future.

"It looks to me," he told the girls, "as if the Cheshire Cat intends to scratch if he can. He declined at first to discuss the matter with me, and insisted on coming over to see you, Vivien. I didn't like to be too rude, because I was afraid he'd press for immediate payment of the first thousand pounds, which we don't want to pay at once if we can help it. I shall have to go up to London and tackle my trustees, and it may take a little time to convince them that I must have some more money already. Then he holds this option, and even if we could raise all the money necessary to pay off the

loan he made your father, he'll still hold this option till October 1924. I thought it best to be as tactful as I could, and in the end he suggested that he would wait the three months and come down here at the beginning of June to discuss the future. But he seems to think you ought to write to him, Vivien. You'd better write and make it clear that you're not going to marry his son, whom, by the way, I'm glad to say I didn't see. Meanwhile I'm going to study the option and the documents that concern the loan and see if there's any kind of a loophole. Not that it's likely," he added with a sigh. "And then, of course, there'll be the succession duties and estate duties and goodness knows what."

"Oh, no," said Vivien. "The Knights of Roon hold the island in perpetual freedom from any taxation on condition of keeping watch and ward against all pirates. We nearly lost Roon, as well as Carrackoon, when my great-grandfather took to smuggling. But we won the case in the Palatinate Chancery Court because no smuggling was ever done by him anywhere in Lyonesse."

"Yes, but I wonder if that will hold good when co-heiresses succeed?" said Dick. "Penfold will be able to tell us that. Which raises another legal point. If your father held Roon from the Palatinate on those terms, how could he enter into an arrangement to take Fuller into partnership?"

"Well, I wondered that," said Vivien. "But I expect he knew what he was doing, and you may be sure that if there was any question about taxes the C.C. would have taken jolly good care to find out about them exactly."

So Dick paid another visit to Penzawn to consult the Controller, from which he returned more cheerful.

"It's all right," he announced. "Provided we don't let any pirates attack Lyonesse, we can apparently do what we like with Roon. The exemption is vested in the owner or owners of the island. Oh, these glorious anachronisms! They're like good red wine in this age of bureaucratic vinegar. But oh, to find some way of getting rid of the firework king! Why should he enjoy these mediæval privileges?"

Vivien wrote a polite letter to Sir Caleb Fuller in which she expressed her regret for not being able to marry his son, and thanked him for his consideration in postponing the repayment of the first instalment of the loan until June. The answer to this was one of Sir Caleb's typical protestations of devotion, affection, and disinterestedness. By mistake he sent her the copy in blue carbon,

which even without the plentiful sprinkling of pounds, shillings and pence would have given a commercial appearance to the expression of his good will. Sir Caleb never wrote the most trifling note without keeping a duplicate, and by keeping volumes and files of all he wrote he must have saved the Recording Angel a great deal of time and paper. He concluded by excusing himself from attending the Knight's funeral on the plea of his hypersensitiveness to the sight of illness, pain and death. *Poor Norman, he wound up, is terribly upset by his disappointment, and at my suggestion he is going to make a little tour round the battlefields in France and Flanders to distract his mind.*

"Fighting other people's battles over again," Venetia commented.

When the Requiem was said and the last Knight of Roon lay beside his twenty-one predecessors in the dark crypt and on the walls of the Chapel above the tablets commemorating his wife and son his crape-shrouded hatchment was set up, Vivien went by herself to the library and knelt beside her father's chair.

"You're not angry with me now?" she asked. "You know now that I love Dick, and that Dick loves me? You understand why I deceived you? You understand everything now? And if you're with Murdo I expect you're too happy not to want me to be happy on earth."

A rap sounded on the door, startling Vivien with the thought that her father's spirit was answering her. She rose from her knees and waited in expectation that presently she would see his tall wraith curl through the room as in childhood she had sometimes conjured ghostly shapes from the smoke of his cigar floating up in the lamp-light toward the ambulatory.

The rap sounded again.

"Come in," she called, not thinking that anybody really would come in, but all the while searching the darker corners for her father's apparition.

The door opened dubiously to admit Sam Hockin full of apologies for disturbing his young mistress.

"They told me you was in here, miss, and I wanted to speak to 'ee in private about something."

Vivien bade him be seated, and without thinking how much it signified she took her father's place before the old cherry-wood table.

"Well, Sam, what is it?"

The mason related what had happened on that wet and windy night before the Knight's illness.

"And you think my father would like you to take out the stone now?" she asked.

"I'm plumb sure he would, miss. 'That box do belong to Miss Vivien and Miss Venetia, Sam,' he did say to me very fierce, 'and on'y for them are you ever to take out that there stone!' So, begging your pardon, miss, I took the liberty to bring up my tools, and which is outside now."

Vivien, who rather dreaded that some family skeleton was going to be unearthed, asked the mason once more if he thought that her father intended the stone to be taken out after his death, or if it was only to be taken out should she and her sister so order.

"Well, I look at it this way, miss," said Sam. "The old Knight—God rest him comfortable, for though I'm no Roman Catholic as you do know, I never could see nothing against such a prayer—the Knight did never know he were going to die so sudden. He'd be thinking he'd have time to tell 'ee about this here box he made me wall up, so that when the time come you'd send down along for me and give me the orders. And if I was you, miss, begging your pardon, I'd give me the order now. 'Tis between you and me, as the saying is, and if 'tis summat you'd like to see put back quick, why, I'll put it back fitty and no man living will ever know what we done. I can seal up my own mouth if need be, so well as I can seal up a wall."

"Very well, Sam, fetch in your tools and take out this box."

While the mason worked, Vivien sat at her father's table, wondering if after all Sam's arrival immediately on top of her attempt to obtain her father's good will for her love might not be his way of answering her. It surely could not be anything so very terrible he had walled up in the turret there, or he would never have told Sam that she and Venetia could always ask for it.

Meanwhile, the clink of the mason's hammer resounded from the turret stairs as he worked to remove the stone. Presently he laid a small steel box on the table in front of Vivien, together with the key that would open it. Inside she found a packet wrapped in paper to the string of which was attached a little golden crucifix. Underneath the packet was a letter addressed in the Knight's fine handwriting, *Sir Murdoch Romare, Bt.*, and in brackets [*but in the event of his absence only to be opened either by Miss Vivien or Miss Venetia Romare*].

She broke the seal and read what was inside.

Romare's House,
Isle of Roon.

April 7th, 1917.

My dear Boy,

If you are reading this letter it will mean that God in his great mercy will have granted me the strength of will to resist a temptation.

Shortly before your dear mother died she begged me to make some kind of provision for you and your sisters, in case the ill-luck which so frequently upset all my calculations should extend itself so far as seriously to endanger my financial stability. Having as I regret to say given her cause more than once during our married life to fear such a possibility, I took the steps to convert the sum of £12,457 into diamonds, promising her at the same time never, whatever my financial situation, to turn those diamonds back into money. Several times I was tempted to break this solemn promise when my rashness had involved me in losses at play that I could ill afford. However, I managed to keep my fingers from the diamonds and my promise to your mother. Soon after you left Sandhurst I found that the war by destroying the value of my foreign investments was likely to leave me a beggar at the end of it unless I were able by a run of luck that was long overdue to recoup myself at the tables. Knowing only too well the weakness of my character when under the influence of the passion for play, I began to doubt my ability to resist making use of this little hoard. On several occasions already I had actually taken the packet out, and only the necessity of untying the crucifix that belonged to your mother restrained me from dipping my greedy fingers into the diamonds. Finally I resolved to have the box walled up in the turret, in the hope that the impossibility of getting it out without the help of Sam Hocking would give me time to recover my senses and avoid what I should consider a mortal sin. I know that if you are reading these words my ruse under God's mercy will have been successful. If luck is with me I shall be able to leave you a rich man. If not, when you read these words you will have nothing except Roon and these diamonds. Whatever you have you will I know take care first of all to see that your sisters are provided for.

Nobody is better aware than myself what a careless and improvident father I have been. I have seen no signs yet that you have inherited my wretched vice. You will, I know, absolve me

from indulging in the folly of exercising the fool's prerogative to warn others. On me and me alone is the blame for being a gamester. Should you become a gamester, the blame will be entirely yours. To a gamester warnings are useless. His fatally sanguine temperament will always discount them.

Whether I shall have the opportunity of saying some of this to you on my death-bed God in His wisdom alone knows; but as I sit writing this letter I have a feeling that I shall not. I have, too, another dread, which all who have sons in uniform at this time must feel. Pray for me, Murdo, and you, Vivien and Venetia, to whom I hope Murdo will read this letter.

The gold crucifix is to be given to Vivien with my love and my blessing.

*Your affectionate
Father.*

"Will you want me any more, miss?" Sam Hockin asked.

Vivien shook her head.

"Perhaps you'd rather I put back the stone another time, miss?"

She nodded, and the mason left her alone in the library.

"He sends me his love and his blessing," she murmured. Then with tear-dimmed eyes she looked across at her father's empty chair. Oh, and there in the corner where he must have laid it when he last came in from the garden was his reaping-hook; and now he too was reaped.

When Vivien joined Dick and Venetia in the schoolroom she found them wrestling with the various documents that Sir Caleb Fuller had gone to so much trouble to prepare. It was such good news that they had the money to pay him off that for the moment they forgot about the option.

"Ah, but he won't want that now," Venetia said. "He won't like us as partners at all."

"I don't know," said Dick, remembering the Cheshire Cat's visit to Carrackoon. "My opinion is that he's quite capable of taking up the option at once just because he'll know how much you'll hate to have him. Let's review the situation. Presumably the diamonds will fetch £12,000. They may fetch more."

"Oh, well, we won't count on that," said Vivien quickly.

"All right, say £12,000. Then there's about £1,100 in cash of which £300 ought to be paid at once as interest. That leaves £800.

Well, it's pretty obvious that £800 plus my £500 a year won't keep Roon going as it is at present. Yet, I'm afraid that if you start getting rid of everybody Fuller may get nervous and take up his option at once."

"And we couldn't get rid of everybody," Vivien put in. "We couldn't get rid of Holt."

"Or Hamblyn," Venetia added.

"Or Sam Hockin," said Vivien.

"There you are, you see," Dick said, shaking his head. "I tell you the next move is a problem. Of course, we could all go and live on Carrackoon and hand Roon over to him. But it goes against the grain to do that. And then there arises the question of the trippers. Do you intend to exploit these new tea-rooms and this Tom Fool golf-course?"

"No," both girls declared emphatically.

"It's all very well to say 'no' like that, but where's the money coming from otherwise? You may *have* to."

The girls groaned.

"Now let's look at things from Fuller's point of view. Why did he ever persuade your father into accepting that loan? What was his scheme? It wasn't charity, that's sure. I don't believe Fuller ever transferred sixpence from one pocket to another without hoping to get something out of the exchange. I've been going through all his letters to your father, and he's continually protesting his anxiety to take up the option but all the time vowing that he's not in a position to do so. Well, we know by what he offered to do for that love-sick cub of his that it's all bunkum about his pretended poverty. Therefore, evidently for some purpose of his own it doesn't suit him to take up the option at present. Quite why, I can't yet make out, but it seems to me that when he lent your father this £10,000 he must have known that he stood no chance of being repaid. That's where the bill of sale came in. I think he must have hoped not only to get a half share of Roon pretty cheap, but also to get hold of all your possessions pretty cheap. Of course, it may be that he plotted to get hold of you, Vivien, from the start. If that was his object, he would presumably give up the option now that it has failed. But I don't know. I don't trust him. I'm sure there's a good deal of malice in the blighter. Look here, I think I'd better go up to London or wherever he is and see if I can't bluff him into giving himself away."

Sir Caleb met Dick in the National Liberal Club; but he did

not offer him a champagne lunch. In fact he did not offer him so much as a small Bass.

"I hope you won't misunderstand me, Mr. Deverell, when I say that I don't at all care for discussing the Miss Romares' business with you. Their dear father was a great friend of mine, and knowing as I do how very much he disliked you I feel a certain disloyalty to his memory in permitting you to be the go-between."

"I'm afraid you'll have to put your feelings—er—in your pocket, Sir Caleb," Dick said firmly. "Vivien and Venetia have asked me to manage their business for them. So, first of all, here's a cheque for £300 being the interest for the first half year on the £10,000 you lent their father."

"Thank you very much," said Sir Caleb, who had never accepted money discourteously in his life, even from such an objectionable young man as this. "I see that you have written this cheque," he added. "You probably didn't realize that there ought to be an extra few pounds of interest from April 15th to the present. But don't bother about that now. It can be added to the £270 due next October 15th."

"I'm prepared to write a cheque for £10,000," said Dick boldly, "if you will let me tear up that option you hold."

Sir Caleb smiled.

"Out of your own banking account?"

"As soon as I can arrange matters with my trustees."

"Unfortunately, Mr. Deverell, when I ventured to interest myself in your lease of Carrackoon I took the trouble to ascertain something about your private means, and I am as well aware as you that you are not in a position to write me a cheque for £10,000."

Dick flushed. He was beginning to find it difficult not to punch Sir Caleb's head as a convincing argument.

"Well, if you know so much about my private means," he said hotly, "you'll know that at any rate I am in a position to find enough money to pay you off every six months."

"Not quite, Mr. Deverell, not quite," Sir Caleb said.

Dick tried another bluff.

"Very well then, Sir Caleb, you must take up the option at once. It's the only decent thing you can do in the circumstances. How are those two girls going to maintain Roon and pay you back?"

"I understand you would help them to do both," said Sir Caleb smoothly. "Come, come, Mr. Deverell, you have taken it upon

yourself to act as a man of business for Vivien and Venetia Romare, so let us talk as men of business. Their father borrowed £10,000 from me on very easy terms . . ."

"On Shylock's terms," Dick burst in.

"Leave this club, you insolent young puppy!" Sir Caleb shouted furiously. His face turned a deep red and as rapidly faded out to a livid pallor. His grey eyes were blazing. "How dare you come here and insult me in my own club? If Vivien and Venetia Romare want me to take up this option, they've made a great mistake in choosing you as their agent. I'll take up the option when *I* choose. Understand that. The best thing you can do is to occupy yourself with seeing that I am paid back punctually the instalments of the loan I made their father. If they had approached me in a different manner, I might have made a sacrifice and taken up the option this Summer out of good will. But as they've seen fit to make use of *you*, they'll have to receive a lesson. Now go out of my club. I'm coming down to Roon next week to see those young ladies, and if you've any consideration for them you'll not be present at the interview. Now leave my club, or I'll ring for the porter and have you thrown out."

As the result of this interview Dick told the girls he was perfectly sure that whatever Sir Caleb thought they least wanted he would certainly try to do.

"Therefore, as we don't want him to take up this option, we must pretend that we do," he said.

The day after Dick's return Tom Bell, who had never hidden his dislike of his presence on Roon, came to see Vivien with a letter from Sir Caleb in his hand.

"Miss Vivien," he said, "you mustn't send that Mr. Deverell to see Sir Caleb again. He's written me a letter complaining about him. And you know we must get him to take up the option somehow, or we shan't be able to carry on."

"Have you told Sir Caleb that?" Vivien asked.

"Yes, I told him, Miss Vivien. But he knows it already. The only way with him is to give in to him about everything," Tom Bell declared earnestly. "That's what I always told Sir Morgan. And that's what you've got to do. Anything he asks for let him have it at once."

"You think that's the way?" Vivien asked coldly.

"Yes, Miss Vivien," he went on eagerly. "You see, there won't be enough money to pay him back his first thousand pounds in

June by the time I've paid the wages for the next three months, and then what will we do? It's a matter of life and death, as you might say, he should take up this option."

"You'd like to have Sir Caleb here?" Vivien pressed.

"Well, he's a very nice man and he's really a splendid man of business. He knows just what he wants and he sees that he gets it."

"I'm sorry, Bell, that I don't require an agent who corresponds with people over my head. So, I'm afraid I shan't require your services after to-day. I will give you a cheque for a month's salary. But I wish you to leave the island immediately."

"Leave the island . . . leave Roon?" he stammered.

"Yes."

Tom Bell's eyes filled with tears.

But Vivien had no mercy.

"If Sir Caleb Fuller takes up his option," she said, "and wishes to employ your services I shall not make any objection. You'd better go and see him in Penzawn when he comes down to discuss matters with me."

Poor Tom Bell found that, though Sir Caleb was very sympathetic with the ungrateful treatment he had received from the late Knight's daughter, he was by no means prepared to upset his own plans by taking up the option for the benefit of Tom Bell.

"And I always did rather feel that Sir Morgan was paying you more than you were really worth," he added gravely. "So that if I ever did take up the option and saw any way of making use of you, Bell, I couldn't possibly afford to pay you anything like five pounds a week. I don't really think you're worth more than two pounds ten shillings at the most."

Thus did Sir Caleb protect himself against the humblest contingency. Poor Tom Bell had been supposing for years that he was invaluable, and he really staggered from the Queen's Hotel, on the pavement outside which he met Sam Hockin, who was shopping in Penzawn.

"Have you ever heard me speak against Sir Caleb Fuller, Sam?" he demanded.

"No, Mr. Bell, you always spoke up for the man against a good many of us."

"Well, he's not Sir Caleb to me any more, Sam. No, he's Fuller. Yes, in future to me he's Fuller. He won't get 'Sir Caleb' again from me. He's Fuller to me from now on."

A month or so later Tom Bell set out for the South Seas with his savings.

Sir Caleb himself, quite unaware of his degradation by Tom Bell, crossed over to Roon to discuss the future with Vivien. He scowled when he saw Venetia and that horrible young bounder Deverell.

"Venetia's rather young as yet for business, isn't she?" he suggested, looking round the gaunt Victorian drawing-room where he was being received.

"Oh no, Sir Caleb," Venetia assured him sweetly. "I'm young in years, but old in wickedness."

"Will you explain our point of view to Sir Caleb, Dick?" Vivien requested.

Sir Caleb scowled again, and when Venetia asked him if the sun was in his eyes he squeezed out a smile that was to former smiles as butter spread in the nursery is to butter spread in the drawing-room.

"First of all," said Dick, "here is a cheque for £1,000, being the first half-yearly instalment of £10,000 lent to the late Sir Morgan Romare and repayable by nine more half-yearly instalments with interest at six per cent."

Sir Caleb took the cheque as if he were a charitable institution and breathed his humble gratitude.

"Now, Sir Caleb," Dick went on, "are you prepared to name a probable date for taking up this option? I need not repeat once more the reasons why it is vital that you should make up your mind to do so as quickly as possible."

"I'm afraid I can't possibly name even a probable date," Sir Caleb said. "You see, it entirely depends on . . ."

"Excuse me for interrupting you," Dick said, "but I don't think any abstract discussion of your private means has any bearing on the matter. You can't give us a probable date?"

"I'm afraid not," said Sir Caleb in a melancholy voice.

"That's all we want to know. In that case I must give you formal notice that the island will be closed up. If you look at the documents you will see that Sir Morgan has fulfilled all the conditions there laid down. So that Vivien and Venetia are entitled to wait until you take up this option before they do anything further, provided that the repayments are punctually executed."

Sir Caleb smiled to himself. He really could not help smiling.

"Provided they are paid, yes," he murmured. "And of course the interest."

"You do not find any stipulation that they should maintain Roon? You thought of most things, Sir Caleb, but you'll agree that you forgot to stipulate that," said Dick.

"It was always clearly understood between Sir Morgan and myself that he would maintain Roon," Sir Caleb declared in a shocked voice.

"Come, come, Sir Caleb," said Dick impatiently. "I don't think there's much room for understandings or misunderstandings in these documents. They were drawn up by your own solicitor, you must remember."

Dick took a deep breath and looked at the girls. The critical moment had arrived.

But before he could deal the final blow, Venetia had jumped up like a young Portia.

"And there's another thing you forgot to put in, my dear Sir Caleb," she cried. "You remembered to arrange for storing your toilet-paper and Tabasco sauce off the yacht on Roon, but you never arranged for yourself being able to use them. Ha-ha, Mr. Cleversticks! You forgot to put in that you could come to Roon when you liked. So until you take up the option you're not going to put your foot on Roon again. Now then!"

"No," Dick added fiercely, for he owed Sir Caleb this, "no! And so get off this island at once! Get off this island at once, do you hear, or we shall have to ring and have you thrown off."

Sir Caleb looked at the three young people, and hesitated. He did not like being ordered off the island. He was very much tempted to take up the option then and there in order to assert himself.

But his commercial prescience came to the rescue of his wounded dignity. How were they going to find even one more instalment of the loan? If he took up the option now he should have neither pleasure nor profit from Roon. But when they were in default . . . he smiled to himself, turned on his heels, and walked out of the drawing-room.

The three young people stared at one another for a few moments in a stupefaction of relief. Then Venetia ran across to the windows overlooking the lawn, put a finger to her lips, and held up a warning hand.

"Yes, there he goes," she cried at last. "Hip-hip-hip-hurrah!"

In the middle of the room was one of those Victorian cruet-stands of treble chairs, the admiration in its day of Dame Gertrude

Romare. Venetia jumped up and down on the seat of each in turn till the springs gave way.

"Oh, I *have* wanted to break that beastly bit of furniture for such a long time," she panted as she sank down upon it with a final plump. "And what a chance!"

"We took a big risk," Dick sighed. "But it seems to have come off all right. Though, of course, we've got nearly five years to run before we're actually safe."

"Oh yes," Venetia went on, "but if we play him well and pretend each time we pay up that it's more and more difficult, he'll always be hoping that next time we really shall fail."

"But I do hate paying the brute over £1,500 of interest," Dick grumbled. "I wonder if we'd realized all the diamonds and offered him a cheque for the whole amount . . ."

"No, no," Vivien interposed. "I'm sure he'd have taken up the option at once out of spite. If we get rid of him for ever for £1,500 it will be cheap."

"But suppose at the end of the five years he comes in? We shall look rather fools, shan't we?" said Dick.

"Ah, but you don't know what Roon will look like in five years," Venetia reminded him. "The Cheshire Cat was worried by the lichen on the trees. You wait till he sees the whole island overgrown like the Sleeping Beauty's Palace. He won't want to be our partner then. Don't you worry about that. Oh, and Dick, I forgot about me myself. Think how overgrown I shall be. The C.C. hates me now. But just you wait till I'm going to be twenty-one, and see how he hates me then."

"And now," said Dick, looking at Vivien, "we'd better talk to Holt, Hamblyn and Sam Hockin about the future. We mustn't waste any time in getting rid of the others."

Vivien groaned.

"Oh, Dick, it's going to be a ghastly business. I really don't know how I managed to tell Tom Bell he must go."

"You've just got to be brave," he said. "Would you like me to do it for you?"

"No, I don't think that would be fair to them. I'll manage it somehow, but the prospect makes me feel quite sick. It'll be bad enough even with Siddle and Jervis, but how, how, how am I going to tell Fred Carlow and Ernie Pascoe? Oh, Dick, don't you think we might keep them on?"

"You can't, my dear. You can't afford it."

"And the horses and the cows," Vivien said falteringly.

"And Cerberus and the dogs," Venetia lamented.

All the jubilation over outwitting Sir Caleb for the time was turned to grief at the necessity that lay before them.

In the end, however, it was decided that Fred Carlow could pay himself by trapping rabbits, and that Ernie Pascoe's wages would be saved out of what they could gain by keeping three cows and of course the bull.

"Then I could live down at the Inn with Sam Hockin and his wife," Venetia suggested, "and do dairy-work."

"And I think perhaps after all we'll have to let trippers come in the Summer and get tea," Vivien said. "I think Roon will put up with them for a few years. That would pay for Cerberus and the dogs' keep and two of the horses which are really too old to sell. And Hamblyn could get in some money by bringing trippers over in the *Mermaid*."

"Oh yes," Venetia agreed. "And I'll work the boat with him."

"And then why shouldn't Janie Pascoe come over and do housework at Carrackoon?" Vivien suggested.

"And we'll do digging for you, Dick, whenever you want any digging done," said Venetia.

"And of course," Dick added, "we might grow bulbs in some of the fields here. After all, Fuller never leaves the roads, so that as long as they're sufficiently discouraging he won't covet the daffodils, because he'll never see them."

The notion of fields that once grew wheat sinking so low in the world as to grow daffodils depressed John Holt considerably.

"Flowers be well for a maid's nosegay," he said. "But odd rat it, to turn good wheat into daffadillies, that's bad, that is."

However, Dick's enthusiasm, coupled with the assurance that tulips and daffodils would help to keep Sir Caleb's hands off the island much more effectively than the finest wheat ever grown, reconciled him to the innovation. He was particularly taken by the thought of tulips.

"Daffadillies be a poor kind of flower," he said. "But toolips, that's a bit different. That's a decent upstanding flower wi' a bit of show to him, that is. Oh, I han't got too much to say against toolips. And I reckon you han't neither," he added, regarding Dick with a twinkle in his gay old eyes. "But sweet-williams be the best of them all. Give I a good bunch of sweet-williams, an' the King of England may sit so still as a pulled turnip on his fine satin

cushions wi'out me coveting his ox nor his ass nor anything that be his."

So Romare's House was shut up. The girls went down to live at the Inn with the Hockins until the wedding on Midsummer Day. The gardens and the hedges and the trees were bidden to grow as they would. Roon was laid under a long spell of beauty and peace.

The kexes should grow breast-high in the ditches, and upon the pastures the ragwort should scatter its gold. The lamp-posts of Sir Caleb Fuller should be wreathed in woodbine and bittersweet, and the roof of his tea-house overgrown with ivy. Not a rut should be smoothed. Not a fence nor a gate should be mended; nor even a stone set back in the wall whence it had fallen. Where the barley ripened, the bracken should now rust. The teasle should scatter its seeds without hindrance. Brambles and thistles should thrive, and nettles flourish. Heather and sage and centaury should usurp the high leas, burdock and sorrel the low-lying meadows. The poppies should be welcome for their scarlet, and all bright weeds for their beauty. What it was in the beginning Roon should become again—an island of roses and foxgloves, of blackthorn and bluebells and fern; and the only shadow upon it should be cast by the high clouds.

Dick forbade Vivien to cross over to Carrackoon until she stepped ashore there as his wife; and all the rest of that cuckoo-loud Spring he and Grimmer worked harder than ever bringing furniture over from the mainland. By the terms of the Knight's agreement with Sir Caleb no furniture could be moved from Roon, and Dick was glad that he was spared from practising such an economy, for he had set his heart on preparing that house on Carrackoon entirely by himself. The white room was ready by the middle of June. The larger window opened southward on the wooded hillside and the garden full of flowers and birds, and of more butterflies than were ever seen in so small a space before—so many that with every dusk plants which had finished their flowering in the Spring flowered again with sleeping butterflies for blossoms; but in the east wall Dick had caused to be cut a little casement, so that, as in her tower, here too Vivien should see the yellow sun rise over Lyonesse and lance his long rays across the morning sea. The curtains were of pale blue-green poplin. There were no pictures, and the furniture was of the simplest here as elsewhere in the house. But the simplest furniture acquires a history if it has been brought over the sea in a small boat and landed on a steep beach and carried up a long

slope by oneself. And the simplest tale of love may be worth the telling if lovers have waited with true hearts for their possession.

On Midsummer Eve Dick rowed over to Roon; and while Venetia and the rest of them were decking the Chapel with eglantine and honeysuckle under the approving eyes of Penfold who was to give the bride away, he and Vivien wandered through a rose-plumed sunset to Greenwater Cove. Those tall foxgloves had nearly flowered themselves away by now; but there were still two or three freckled crimson bells trembling at the top of the seeded stalks in the perfumed breeze of dusk.

"And it has all come true," he whispered in awe.

But she had no words; only a look and a sigh and all of herself for him.

37

EPIGRAPH

On a mid-October afternoon—an afternoon of fierce southerly weather—Sir Caleb Fuller stood at the window of his bedroom in the Queen's Hotel, Penzawn, and looked glumly out at the islands shrouded in driving rain. It was the same bedroom that Dick Deverell occupied almost exactly seven years before when under similar conditions he first gazed across the foaming Sound at Roon and Carrackoon. Sir Caleb was to cross over and receive a cheque for £1,030 as soon as this abominable wind allowed him. He was also to decide whether or not he would take up the option that he had now held for five years. How his debtors had managed to be punctual with their repayments during these years was a mystery to him; but somehow against all his calculations they had succeeded. He had wondered for awhile if they had discovered some secret source of revenue on the island itself and if they were profiting by it accordingly; but inquiries on the neighbouring mainland had elicited nothing. To be sure, it was reputed that Mr. Deverell of Carrackoon was making a very pretty thing out of his flower-growing, but no partnership in which he could enter was likely to make *him* a sharer in those profits. And yet, of course, if this fellow Deverell was as clever as they said, it might be worth while to offer to invest some money in his business. A little extra capital just

when it was needed might be of the greatest service to him . . . half unconsciously Sir Caleb began to play with the figures. Suppose he offered to invest £2,000? Deverell might take a salary of £350 and twenty per cent of all the profits over £1,000 a year. Or was that too extravagant? Really there was something to be said for such an investment . . . and once more the busy greedy mind juggled the figures up and down until presently the capital invested shrank to half, the salary to nothing, and the percentage on the profits to a level ten per cent. If Sir Caleb had owned a camel, that camel before he had finished with it as a workable proposition would have slipped through the eye of a needle a very great deal more easily than its master would ever contrive to insinuate himself into the Kingdom of God.

The porter interrupted the rich man's day-dreams by rapping at the door to say that Miss Romare was waiting downstairs. Sir Caleb had not seen Venetia for four and a half years, and it shocked him very much to find that she was grown up. It always shocked him when things grew up. He cherished a delusion that a maudlin affection for children, puppies and kittens was a sign of an idealistic temperament. Moreover, things that grew up always cost a great deal more to keep.

Venetia announced that she had come over in the *Mermaid* for the express purpose of taking him across to Roon.

"But isn't it a little too rough?" he asked dubiously.

"Oh no, not a bit," she declared. "And we're anxious to get this business settled."

"Yes, *I'm* very anxious to do that," he assured her solemnly.

"Then come along," she urged. "We want to save all the water we can in the harbour."

Sir Caleb nodded approval. He had not the faintest idea how this was done, but a desire to save anything, even water, struck him as most laudable.

"Will you have anything before we start—a glass of lemonade or ginger-beer—or something?" he inquired.

"I'll have a tot of rum," said Venetia. "And you'd better have the same. It'll keep the wind out."

"Rum?" Sir Caleb echoed faintly. "You didn't say 'rum,' did you?"

She nodded.

"Will they keep such a liquor here?" he asked.

"Oh rather!"

She held up two fingers to the barman who was passing through the lobby at this moment.

"Rums, Bray."

"Yes, Miss Romare."

When about half-way across the stormy Sound Sir Caleb felt more queasy than he had felt for many years he attributed it to that rum which Venetia had forced upon him. Yet he could hardly accuse her of trying to make him sick inasmuch as she had drunk a glass herself. Borch! What filthy stuff! Burch! It was flopping about inside him like a pool of treacle. Borch! Burch!

"Look out," Venetia screamed over the wind. "We're going about."

Sir Caleb decided to sit as still as he could, with the result that the boom took his hat from his head as clean as Tell's arrow took the apple.

"You ought to ha' bobbed down, sir," Hamblyn growled severely.

Sir Caleb who was sitting on the weather side found the angle at which the boat was now sailing most uncomfortable, and he was just thinking of changing his place when a heavy sea struck the *Mermaid* and helped him over to the lee side much more quickly than he had wanted to go.

They were the better part of two hours in getting over to Roon. Sir Caleb walked up the slippery steps of the quay, glad to be on land, but wishing that it were any other land than Roon. He asked himself how he could ever have supposed that this beastly little island was worth turning into something better.

"We won't get back to-night, miss," Hamblyn was saying. "There's a dirty sea running to Rosevean. I dussn't take the *Mermaid* round to the steps."

"Never mind," Venetia said. "I think Sir Caleb wants to have a good look round. It'll blow itself out by tomorrow morning, and the rain has stopped."

Sir Caleb asked where Vivien was.

"She and Dick were supposed to come over to meet you," Venetia replied. "But I expect they couldn't manage to cross. I don't suppose they dreamt for a moment you'd be coming."

"No, I don't suppose they did," Sir Caleb said savagely, for wherever he looked he was seeing former enemies. "Good gracious me, is that Holt?"

The old man—a very old man indeed now—dabbed his forehead as vigorously as ever, though he was so much shrivelled up by

age that how he held his own against this blusterous south-west wind any better than the whirling yellow leaves of the elm-trees was a marvel.

"You had it a bit dirty coming over, Sir Calip," he said. "Beg pardon, miss, but I wouldn't say as Sam Hockin couldn't lend Sir Calip a suit of his clothes."

"No, thank you," said the victim shortly. "I'll walk off this wet."

Venetia insisted on handing him over the cheque for the outstanding amount of the loan before she took him round the island.

"And then we'll have a look at the golf-course," she told him.

"I see you haven't used the nice new tea-rooms," said Sir Caleb, gazing mournfully at the former barracks, the restored tiles of which were already being attacked by ivy.

She shook her head and led the way along the road above the eastern shore. This was still passable, although the brambles had flung great suckers with fierce cornelian teeth across it, and the heavy rains of the last few days had made a quagmire of the neglected road itself.

"Oh dear, it is untidy, isn't it?" Sir Caleb wailed. "And I'm getting a little bit scratched, I'm afraid."

But Venetia was inexorable. By the gate leading into the tangled garden of Punch Bowl Cottage, she paused.

"You thought this would be a good place for Miss Upcott, didn't you? But it'll want a good deal doing to it now before it can be lived in."

Sir Caleb looked at the cottage in which his idyllic mind had placed Miss Upcott to spend a peaceful and not useless old age, since she would always be able to do his accounts and manage his correspondence, and of course pay a reasonable rent. Poor Miss Upcott would not like it now, however cheaply she could have it. The doors and windows were invisible for nettles and briars, and the blackthorns on the hillside behind seemed to be growing right down to the back door. Sir Caleb turned away from the unpleasant sight. Beyond Penmarrack the bracken had mastered the sandy road completely. Progress through the dripping fronds was most uncomfortable. But Venetia had no mercy.

"This is a little better," Sir Caleb sighed, when at last he stood on the short turf between Big and Little Tor. "But . . . but . . . what's happened to the beautiful golf-course your father laid out? It seems to have vanished."

"It has," Venetia agreed. "It vanished even more quickly than we hoped it would."

Venetia did not take Sir Caleb by the upper road to Romare's House, because the upper road was in fairly good order and two of the fields were planted with Paper Whites whose green spears were already pricking through the soil and promising a fine early harvest of flowers. Not that Sir Caleb would have recognized them for narcissus, but it was as well to take no risks. So, back they toiled through the wet fern and the fierce brambles to make the ascent of the drive.

No gravel had been laid down all these years, and the rains had by now carved it into a zigzag of ruts. The hedgerows were in a wild tangle, the gutters were overgrown with grass, the weeds were thick in the path. And all those beautiful lamp-posts over the estimates for which he had brooded with so much care might have been dirty old trees so thick were they hung with honeysuckle and ivy and bittersweet.

But it was the garden of Romare's House that sealed Sir Caleb's disgust. Those ilex-shadowed walks up and down which he had so often paced with the Knight, making all sorts of splendid plans for the future of Roon, were now impassable. That wide green lawn was like a hayfield. Those enclosures which ought to have been planted with fruit and vegetables were now a ruin of weeds above which here and there a spray of Autumn roses quivered in a jet of crimson bloom.

"Well, what about the option?" Venetia asked.

"Oh, thank you very much, but I'm afraid it's too late now. Too late," he repeated in the voice of one who has lived for others and found humanity a failure. "One tries to help people . . . one hopes . . ." His voice broke with self-pity. "But never mind. That's all over now."

"And of course you forfeit your tractors and broken-down wireless," she reminded him.

"I suppose so," he gulped.

"I'll have them burnt to-morrow," she said.

As Venetia tore up the option that evening, the wind dropped abruptly, so that Sir Caleb was able to go back to Penzawn next morning under snowy pavilions of clouds and the rain-washed turquoise of an October sky. As the *Mermaid* cast off, the *Melusine* swept over the jade-green water from Carrackoon to Roon.

"We couldn't possibly get over yesterday," Dick called up to Venetia on the quay. "What's happened?"

"He's gone for ever, my dears! And not even left his smile behind him. So my delightful nephew Roly and my delicious niece Melusine will never, never, never see the Cheshire Cat, though they shall see a glorious bonfire of his rubbish."

Melusine, who was three years old, burst into tears.

"I wanted to see him. I wanted to see him. Oh, why can't I see him? Oh, *why* can't I?"

"But, darling," said her mother, trying to console her, "he wasn't a nice pussy cat like yours."

"But I wanted to see him," Melusine insisted.

Morolt, a year younger, regarded his sister stolidly.

"I seeded him," he declared.

"Oh, Roly, how can you tell such a story?" his mother protested.

"I *did* seed him," he repeated. "But when I saided 'Peep-bo,' he wasn't there."

At this he gurgled with laughter; and his sister, making the best of a bad job, decided to laugh too.

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